

## **SCWO's 42nd AGM 2022 PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS BY MS JUNIE FOO**

### **1. Introduction**

It is wonderful for all of us to be able to gather physically again! It has been an exciting and eventful year for SCWO especially with 2021 dedicated as the year of Celebrating Singapore Women! It brought a lot of attention to important issues affecting women, starting good conversations which led to actionable plans to further support women's development.

SCWO led and supported many activities focussing on women's development issues. Together with two key partners, PA Women's Integration Network Council and the NTUC Women and Family Unit, we conducted more than 100 conversations on Singapore Women's Development, with our members, and at the grassroots level.

### **2. Conversations on Women's Development**

These conversations contributed to the SCWO Conversations on Women's Development report, which was submitted to the Government in September 2021. SCWO's report covered several findings and issues raised at the conversations. We also put up our recommendations that was collated which our members have contributed during the dialogue sessions. The report also features upcoming programs by SCWO and our member organisations. These programs and initiatives aim to help women in vulnerable situations, as well as empower women and girls in the workplaces, community, schools and homes. I take this opportunity to thank members who responded to our call to have their wonderful programs featured in the report.

The closing session of The Conversations on Singapore Women's Development in Sept last year was definitely a highlight of the year. SCWO presented our report to Prime Minister at that event. Prime Minister announced that he supports one of our recommendations, which is to dedicate a public space to honour and celebrate women. This space, a garden, is right in the heart of the City at Dhoby Ghaut Green. We are thrilled that our proposal was accepted and that discussions have started. Moving forward, we want to involve many women to share their ideas and dreams for Women's Garden!

SCWO is also featured in the Celebrating Singapore Women's exhibition that is a round up to the year-long conversation on Singapore Women's Development. This roving exhibition was launched by Prime Minister at Plaza Singapura, in April and is travelling to 4 heartland locations from May to Sep this year. It's now at Kampong Admiralty till 3 July, do visit this inspiring exhibition honouring women pioneers who shaped Singapore's success today and trailblazers who are shaping Women's development for our future!

### **3. BoardAgender**

Speaking of trailblazers, our BoardAgender Mentoring Programme has been receiving very positive feedback from the mentees. BoardAgender created this programme believing that there would be a similar interest by many aspiring female directors to participate in such a programme in order to get on commercial and not-for-profit-boards. The programme complements other current initiatives being run by other interest groups in Singapore such as the Council for Board Diversity and the Singapore Institute of Directors, who are currently focused more on commercial boards, and support building a sustainable pipeline of future female directors.

During the BoardAgender Mentoring Programme for Aspiring Women Directors 2021, in addition to the 1 on 1 mentor-mentee sessions, BoardAgender held 3 webinar sessions specially for the mentees over the span of 6 months - this included a session with 2 well established female board directors, another with a senior executive with an executive search agency which specialises in placing board directors, and the third session, focused on female board directors on family-owned businesses.

On 13 January 2022, BoardAgender's first cohort of ten mentees from its Inaugural Mentoring Programme for Aspiring Women Directors 2021 celebrated the successful completion of their six-month mentoring programme at a ceremony held with their mentors and the BoardAgender committee at The American Chamber of Commerce in Singapore (AmCham Singapore)'s office. At the closing ceremony, the mentees had the opportunity to learn from Lay Lim Teo, Independent Director of UOB and SPH Media and a BoardAgender SG50 Champion, on her experiences as a senior leader and now a director.

## **4. International Relations & Conferences**

SCWO engages and works with local and regional stakeholders to further our work in advancing and empowering women. In this reporting year, despite the pandemic, SCWO continues to participate actively in local, regional, and international conferences through the ASEAN Confederation of Women's Organisations (ACWO), ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network (AWEN) and the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR).

The Singapore Business Federation (SBF) launched the SBF Singapore Women Entrepreneurs Network (SG-WEN) in September 2021, which took over SCWO as Singapore's representatives at AWEN. SCWO also continues to participate in events and conversations initiated by ACWO after handing over the Presidency to the Council of Women Development of Brunei Darussalam in 2021.

With a United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) accreditation, SCWO participated in processes under the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), such as speaking at Singapore's Third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Outcome in October 2021. SCWO was given the opportunity to share its views on Singapore's human rights journey, particularly in the domain that your organisation covers, and contribute to the wider international dialogue on human rights. SCWO also submitted its ECOSOC quadrennial report for 2018 – 2021 in May 2022.

Star Shelter also took part in the UN NGO Commission on the Status of Women 66 Forum in April 2022. More than ever, crisis shelters play an essential role in society and these conferences provide crisis shelters in Asia the opportunity to come together share best practices to protect survivors and propose workable solutions to end violence against women in all forms.

## **5. MSC**

Maintenance Support Central (MSC) has crossed its 10-year mark! We have served more than 10,000 clients providing support and assistance to empower financially abused women with knowledge about their legal and marital rights and provide them with all-rounded support.

New MSC Service: Legal Guidance

In April 2022, MSC launched Legal Guidance with the aim of assisting clients with general legal information on understanding the processes and terms under Family Law. These could include the process of divorce, maintenance, and custody matters. By offering this added service, MSC's holistic support is enhanced.

## **6. New2U**

In Feb 2022, the New2U Thrift Shop re-opened its doors more permanently after two years of intermittent opening following Covid-19 safe management measures. The Shop is managed entirely by volunteers, some of whom have been volunteering for many years. Proceeds from the store go towards Star Shelter and the various SCWO Programmes and Initiatives.

## **7. Media Coverage**

SCWO, its initiatives, or figures associated with SCWO, was mentioned in 48 articles throughout the reporting year. We were mentioned most in mainstream media like The Straits Times, Channel News Asia, Today, along with other media. We remained relevant by not just providing one-off comments on current affairs, but by submitting commentaries in view of the latest developments. SCWO has become an important resource for journalists for views relating to women, gender diversity, family violence and other current issues that impact women.

## **8. Ageing Taskforce & SAWA**

The SCWO Ageing Taskforce, spearheaded by SCWO, and alongside NTUC-WAF, PA WIN, PPIS, SWA, WEWAM, and WINGS, aims to bring to light the gender related phenomenon of ageing. As the taskforce attempt to seek funding for this project, the Ministry of Social and Family Development shared that a similar project has been ventured into and satisfies SCWO's objectives. Thus, the taskforce is now looking into conducting research on the future cohort of ageing women. As the ages of retirement and re-employment are set to increase in 2030, the taskforce aims to learn how they are preparing for a later retirement and what kinds of support they require for this journey.

The Singapore Alliance of Women in Ageing (SAWA), an alliance between SCWO, AWARE, PPIS and Tsao Foundation that focuses on promoting the independence, care, participation, dignity, and self-fulfilment of older women, acts as an extension of what SCWO and its Ageing Taskforce champions. SAWA submitted its Gender Equality review in contribution to the Conversations on Singapore Women's Development and the subsequent White Paper released by the government.

## 9. Research

In preparation of the upcoming Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) cycle, SCWO has held training sessions for our members organisations with help from the International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW-AP). We hope to provide more training for affiliates interested in writing their own CEDAW reports based on their respective niche areas of interest for individual organisation CEDAW submission.

In the past year, SCWO has also hosted several engagement sessions with our member organisations to hear out their views and obtain feedback on various policies that impact women in Singapore. We look forward to providing women with more platforms and opportunities to push for change and to ensure that their voices are heard.

## 10. Star Shelter

The Star Shelter team worked tirelessly to ensure the health and safety of the residents, volunteers and staff against the virus while continuing to provide its much-needed service to women and children who suffer from abuse. We also extended our support to our former residents, checking on their well-being, providing them with PPEs, food, and other daily necessities.

The pandemic had reduced the shelter's capacity due to safe distancing measures, however, the shelter has risen to the challenge and had undergone expansion works to bring the capacity to close to what was before. The new wing will commence operations in June 2022 with larger more comfortable areas for the residents while still protecting them from Covid-19.

I'd like to thank our members who have contributed greatly to the Star Shelter and its residents. The Singapore Women's Association collaborated with Symrise Asia to provide one-off financial assistance to residents upon leaving the shelter. They have also planned outings and events for Star Shelter. The Inner Wheel Club of Singapore provided household and kitchen appliances and utensils for the Shelter's new wing.

(Optional) Young Women's Leadership Connection has conducted recreational and educational workshops with the residents which includes Zumba and IT classes.

## 11. Singapore Women's Hall of Fame

Since its launch, a total of 174 women have been inducted to the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame (SWHF). Every March, a few more women are inducted following a rigorous selection process, this year we added 7 more. The 8th Singapore Women's Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony was held at the Istana on 8 March 2022, which is International Women's Day. SCWO Patron President Halimah Yacob presented the inductees and the representatives of inductees with The Flame and formally inducted the women into the Hall of Fame.

SWHF's outreach activities include holding mini exhibitions and talks at schools through Project Awesome and organisations. SWHF also organises heritage walks titled "Walking in the Footsteps of

our Foremothers". Since 2014, we have reached more than 200,000 people with our various activities.

## **12. Women's Register**

The Women's Register (WR) serves to be a platform for networking, inspiration, community engagement and education (N.I.C.E) for young women aged eighteen to twenty-five. It is WR's vision to inspire and empower women to take charge of their lives and lead them with confidence, compassion, and courage. Through WR's programmes such as workplace talks and dialogues with partners, members are exposed to opportunities to gain new skills, build character, and hone community leadership skills.

## **13. International Women's Day 2022 – A Bouquet of Hearts**

SCWO has also stepped up on our fundraising efforts, and at the same time creating more awareness of SCWO's initiatives and advocacy work. In celebration of International Women's Day (IWD) in March 2022, SCWO launched our first IWD Fundraising Campaign, "A Bouquet of Hearts" which comprised of an online auction, curated special dinner packages and "Gift-it-Forward" packages for donors to purchase. The fundraising drive culminated in a virtual finale on 25 March with President Halimah Jacob as our guest-of-honour. Close to 5,300 people were reached through our virtual finale viewed on FB Live! More than \$100,000 was raised through the campaign. We partnered with the community too, like the Mother's Day and Gift of Giving campaign. Retailers joined us to raise awareness of violence against women and supporting women in vulnerable situations.

Also, I would like to thank our member organisation Association of Women Doctors Singapore (AWDS) who collaborated with Roger Vivier to raise funds for Star Shelter, through a designer shoe sale in May 2022. 10% of the shoes purchased by AWDS members were donated to Star Shelter.

## **14. Membership**

SCWO has welcomed 1 new Associate Member, SG WEN, bringing our total number to 64 organisations, of which, 54 are ordinary members and 10 are associate members. SCWO engages with our members by providing vital platforms for meaningful discussions. One of which is the SCWO Members Tea Talk Sessions, bringing member organisations of the same category together to network and explore collaboration opportunities.

In March this year we started one-on-one/small group lunches with members to forge better working relationships and encourage more partnerships. Through these small group lunches with the member organisations' executive directors and/or presidents, SCWO would also like to gain feedback on how it can improve its service to members.

## **15. Conclusion - Tributes**

I would like to end by remembering the lives of 2 very special past presidents of SCWO – Ms Malathi Das and Mrs Wee Wan Joo.

Ms Malathi Das, SCWO President 2014 – 2016

We will always remember Malathi for her passion and tireless service in helping vulnerable women and children. As an expert in family law, Mal often went beyond her call of duty to ensure the well-being of her clients, especially when they experienced domestic violence.

During Malathi's presidency (2014 – 2016), she was committed to the mission of empowering women through advocacy and service. Under her leadership, SCWO was granted with Consultative Relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) in May 2016. As a UNECOSOC-accredited non-government organisation (NGO), Mal led SCWO to participate in the Commission on Status on Women (CSW) session and delivered a statement at UN Human Right's Council's formal adoption of Singapore's Universal Periodic Review in June 2016.

Malathi was also well known as a gifted speaker who represented Singapore at conferences and gave rousing speeches on important topics such as violence against women, gender equality, women in poverty, amendments to the Women's Charter, and women leadership.

Though we lost a dedicated advocate Malathi's contributions and service will always be celebrated and remembered.

Mrs Wee Wan Joo, SCWO President 2006 – 2008

For over a decade till her passing, Wan Joo was the Chairperson of the Star Shelter a refuge for women and children who are survivors of family violence. She led the shelter with wisdom, foresight, kindness and understanding. She was an inspiration to the staff and the epitome of a wise, devoted and dependable leader.

Wan Joo personified the virtue of humility. She was not one who would display her good works, instead she would strategically and peaceably work behind the scenes to mitigate problems and resolve issues. Often those who benefitted from her intervention would not even know that she was the one who had helped them and that was how she would have wanted it.

Wan Joo's commitment to end violence against women and children was resolute and went beyond our shores. She was on the steering committee of the Asian Network of Women Shelters bringing shelters in Asia together to share challenges and best practices in shelter work.

In 2016, she was instrumental in Star Shelter's hosting of the Asian Network of Women's Shelter Conference in Singapore which brought together over 50 shelter leaders from 11 Asian countries. She also led many delegations from Singapore to annual shelter conferences during her tenure as Star Shelter Chairperson.



Wan Joo was a past president of the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO) and was awarded the PBM in 2011 for her tireless work and dedication to SCWO.

In 2006, she led the SCWO conference held in Phnom Penh as part of the Asean Confederation of Women's Organisations (ACWO) Network to alleviate poverty in Asia. She was the co-chairperson of the August 2009 APEC Women Leaders Network (WLN) Organising Committee in Singapore.

We were blessed to have had Wan Joo as our mentor, advisor, confidante, pillar of strength and most of all our friend. It is hard to say goodbye to someone so precious. Her legacy lives on at SCWO.