

**SPEECH BY MR LAWRENCE WONG, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND
MINISTER FOR FINANCE AT LAUNCH OF LITTLE STEPS @ NORTH WEST,
NIGHT SAFARI AMPHITHEATRE, SATURDAY, 14 JANUARY 2023**

Mayor Alex Yam and Parliamentary colleagues

North West CDC councilors, Residents, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning, Vanakkam, Selamat Pagi, 大家早上好! I am very happy to join all of you today for the launch of Little Steps @ North West.

It is so good to see everyone here today because we have been fighting COVID-19 for nearly 3 years now and I think by now, we are starting to see things getting back to normal. So this year when we celebrated the start of 2023, we had a big celebration and I am sure many families are gearing up for Chinese New Year which is coming up soon. It is good to see that so many activities resuming back to normal. I am glad that today, all of us, all of our families, our children can be here at the zoo. I hope you get to spend some quality family time together.

In Singapore, a key priority for Government has always made it a priority to make sure that our children can get the best possible start in life. That is why we are working very hard to support our families, especially those who are in the lower-income groups in different ways. Be it in education, rental housing or uplifting your wages. One important programme we started a few years ago is

KidSTART. It is a programme catered for children from age 0 to 6 years old. It brings together early childhood practitioners, healthcare professionals, and educators so that we can help families nurture their children's early development and ensure that the children have a good start in life. So far through KidSTART, we have helped to support more than 4,000 children. We are now progressively expanding the programme nationwide.

The success of KidSTART really depends on close partnership between Government and all our community organisations including our hospitals, social service agencies, and preschools.

There is certainly scope for our community organisations partner with the government and get involved. So that is why, today, I am very happy that North West CDC will be doing its part with the launch Little Steps @ North West programme. As you heard earlier from Mayor Alex Yam, this is a new assistance programme by North West CDC. All families with children up to the age of 6 years old, so long as you are enrolled in KidSTART, you will get \$500 per child per year, to help defray your daily expenses, and to enable you to focus on your child's development. We hope this gesture will provide some immediate relief for our families, especially during this period of heightened inflation. I think all of us should once again to give a big round of applause to our donors and our sponsors who had made this programme possible. Thank you very much.

Of course, the Government will be doing everything we can to help Singaporeans cushion the effects of higher prices. But there is also scope for the community to do its part. So is not just one of the others, but both of us coming together.

This spirit of fellowship is something we must always uphold in Singapore. Which means we must keep encouraging ground-up initiatives and not snuff them out as government steps up its social support. We must strengthen social networks on the ground, so they are truly self-sustaining. That's how we become a truly inclusive society – where the government is active in supporting those who need help, but we also have a vibrant network of individuals and organisations playing an active role in strengthening our social compact.

So I hope that the good work that the North West CDC is doing will provide a role model for other community organisation to do their part and partner with the government, so that together we can support lower- income families in Singapore.

Because, if there is anything we have learnt over the last 3 years, it is that we can only achieve the best outcomes when we work together. So let continue to stay united and do our part to support our fellow Singaporeans and build a better future for our children.

On that note, let me once again wish all of you an enjoyable day at the Zoo. For those of you who celebrate Chinese New Year, let me also take this opportunity to wish you all a happy and healthy Year of the Rabbit. 祝大家身体健康，万事如意，新年快乐。谢谢你们。 Thank you very much.