

For Immediate Release

Not Forgetting the Needy Among Us

SPACES Counseling & Community - A Community Service Group Paints and Cleans Homes of Underprivileged Chinese, Indian and Malay Families in Preparation for Hari Raya Haji and Chinese New Year

Singapore, 25 January 2005 – The recent tsunami disaster is a humbling reminder that all of us can meet the same fate in the face of natural calamities, regardless of race, language, religion, economic status, educational level, gender, sexuality, nationality, age and so on. We are part of a fragile humanity and we will always be.

At home, most of us are fortunate enough to be able to celebrate during these festive periods. However, there are some amongst us who are unable to celebrate in any way but merely struggle to make it through the day. In fact, it was reported that SOS received more distress phone calls during these festive periods than at other times of the year.

In conjunction with Hari Raya Haji and Chinese New Year, SPACES, a counseling and community development agency, organized a community service project, **Projek Muhibah** on 15 Jan 05, to paint and spring clean 30 homes of needy Chinese and Muslim families and elderly living in mostly one-room flats in the Toa Payoh estate. There were more than 180 volunteers from various backgrounds and beliefs, including retired persons, working adults, families and youths, working together. In addition to the painting, the volunteers out of their own initiative, replaced 14 mattresses with pillows and sheets, and, with the help of a sponsor, fumigated homes that were infested with bed bugs.

Explains Jerry Siah, who heads the community development arm of SPACES, “*Muhibah* or ‘Goodwill and Friendship’ in the Malay language is derived from the Arabic word *Muhib*, which means ‘one who loves and cares’. Project Muhibah aims to foster goodwill and lasting friendships in the community while adding color to the living environment of the homes and families we serve as we paint and clean their homes. Over the past one year, we have organized 5 community service projects during festive seasons and we welcome anyone to volunteer. We had families volunteering together during our projects and we brought families together to celebrate with us in our projects. This is in line with the suggestion by Madam Cynthia Phua, MP of Aljunied GRC, during the recent Parliamentary session, to turn festive seasons into events for the old and the young to do things together as a family.”

“Apart from offering people from all walks of life an opportunity for social service, it also promotes inter-racial and religious harmony. At a time when different races and religious groups in the world are drifting apart from one another, and the recent tsunami disaster which had destroyed many lives; lives of which could be those of our closed ones, we want to set an example of how different people, regardless of race, language, religion, gender, nationality, sexuality, age, educational level or economic status can work together to make Singapore a better home for each one of us. While

our hearts reach out to those suffering far from us, let's also join hands to reach out to the needy close to us," he adds.

Ms. Christine Lee, an active volunteer with SPACES Community, elaborates, "During a visit to the 1-room rental flats in the Toa Payoh estate, I was disheartened to know that some of the houses were infested with bed bugs, giving the elderly residents sleepless nights. I witnessed some elderly painfully making their way to the local welfare organization to seek help on cashing out their ERS in time for the festivities. The elderly could not understand the letter from the CPF even though it was in the 4 major languages. Even then perhaps, this letter will be their only letter for a long time. It may also be their only hope for a more meaningful Chinese New Year and Hari Raya Haji. As they made their way slowly along the dark corridor filled with stale air, to go to the bank to have the CPF letter endorsed, it may have also been one of the rare occasions that they ventured outside their flats."

"The elderly were very grateful and thankful to all the volunteers. When I returned to visit one of the flats to ensure that her toilet flush was fixed properly, she started to cry, saying how she was helpless, how even her grandson did not care, and how she appreciated all the volunteers' care. It was really heart-wrenching yet touching. In fact, at the end of that day, I could witness a remarkable transformation in the living environment of the elderly. The most heart-warming thing was to witness the miracle of having restored the joy in the eyes of these elderly. The volunteers have changed the world for these elderly," she adds.

Projek Muhibah culminated with a reunion dinner where SPACES invited the Chinese, Malay and Indian families, together with the volunteers presented to partake in a halal dinner together – a kind of community reunion dinner. This gave the residents from the various communities in the Toa Payoh estate an opportunity for inter-racial interaction, social bonding and community building as they celebrate Hari Raya Haji and Chinese New Year as a united Singapore community.

About SPACES

Conceived in 2001, SPACES is a young, charitable counseling and community development agency. SPACES chooses to proactively affirm people of any race, language, religion, sexuality, nationality, gender, age, educational level or economic status. SPACES' activities include face-to-face counseling, time limited support group programs and voluntary community development projects. For more information, visit www.ourspaces.com

For further enquiries on SPACES Community and Project Muhibah, please email spacescommunity@ourspaces.com