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Speeches

Smart Nation Ambassadors Appreciation Event

28 January 2022

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Welcome Address by Minister Josephine Teo at the Smart Nation Ambassadors Appreciation Event

28 Jan 2022

Thank you for joining us this afternoon, both in person and over Zoom.

I remember when we had the first appreciation event for Smart Nation Ambassadors (SNAs) in 2020, we had to do it virtually, because we were at the peak of the pandemic. I'm glad that I can meet, at least, some of you here today. Hopefully, I will be able to greet all of you in person, in time to come.

SNAs play a critical role in co-creating our Smart Nation

When we first started the SNA programme in 2019, the Smart Nation initiative was still relatively new. At that time, we wanted to create an avenue for citizens, businesses, and different communities to come together and be part of the collective effort in our Smart

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We called for volunteers; and many of you took a leap of faith and believed in a vision that was honestly still a work-in-progress and were prepared to step up and step forward. I'm happy that in the past 2 years, we've managed to enlist a community of about 4,000 SNAs who could see, and believe in, the future we're envisioning.

Our SNAs are not a homogenous group; each of you bring your specific skills, expertise and experiences that add to our efforts. You enrich and make it whole. When Singapore grappled with the challenges of COVID-19, many of you bravely went to the ground to help other Singaporeans understand the new digital tools such as TraceTogether and SafeEntry that some people were once unfamiliar with.

When we introduced the SafeEntry Gateway Box for check-in, our SNAs helped to man the very busy helpdesk. These are just two examples. To us, you are the "special sauce" of our Smart Nation. Thank you.

Honouring Star SNAs

As part of this appreciation event, we want to shine the spotlight on some of our SNAs who contributed in ways, big and small.

There is David Ong, who manned the enquiry helpdesk for SafeEntry Gateway. At the height of the pandemic, David was faced with a really daunting backlog of enquiries, especially from businesses who wanted to set up the device but were unsure how to. He came up with ways to streamline processes, and his team went from dealing with 7,000 enquiries to about 100 a day.

There is also Harriet Seah, who conducted webinars to teach other seniors about tech tools like Instagram and Zoom. This may come naturally for digital natives and millennials who are used to such tools but not for our seniors. For Harriet, this comes as an even bigger personal challenge as she is an introvert.

And we have workplace advocates like Professor Keith Carter and Pratibha Kurnool. They devote time and energy to share tech knowledge and rally colleagues to support our Smart Nation initiatives.

David, Harriet, Keith and Pratibha – you are an inspiration to us all! We are pleased to honour you as Star SNAs for 2021. You will hear more about their efforts in a bit. But first, please join me in giving them, and all our SNAs, a big round of applause for their contributions.

Working together to ensure tech benefits all

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At the last SNA appreciation event in September 2020, some of you participated in a series of Emerging Stronger Conversations. You shared concerns about how some may feel helpless and unable to adapt to new tech, many do feel that technology brings a sense of foreboding. Some of you also thought digital government services could be more user-friendly for seniors and persons with disabilities.

Out of these conversations, we grouped together to equip Singaporeans with basic digital skills so that they can enjoy the benefits of tech. One such initiative is #SmartNationTogether, where we host tech-related webinars. Since its launch in June 2020, Smart Nation Ambassadors from more than 60 business and community groups, as well as individual contributors, have conducted 270 programmes to help Singaporeans learn about digital initiatives and emerging tech.

Let me also address something in the news lately: Scams. This is not a new problem. Since time immemorial, bad actors have been exploiting human emotions like fear, greed and hope to cheat people of their hard-earned monies.

Digital developments make it possible for scammers to continue their exploits – and at a much faster speed, scale and sophistication. Our Smart Nation Ambassadors play a role in helping to educate and inoculate our people from falling for these scams.

But anti-scam measures will need to be enhanced as we can see from the OCBC scams. We must always find new ways to better equip the public to protect themselves and those around them. Any technical measures and public education efforts we embark on will have to be constantly refreshed. This is because we can be sure that scammers will always adapt their methods to continue exploiting human emotions and use technology to trick their victims.

We will always need your support in our efforts and frank views on how we can do better with technology. You understand the challenges, the gaps and the needs on the ground.

To do so, we are launching two new initiatives today to make it easier for Smart Nation Ambassadors and the public to tell us if our digital tools are meeting their needs, and to gather ideas to co-develop our Smart Nation.

SNA Citizen Co-creation Group (CCG)

First, the Smart Nation Ambassadors Citizen Co-Creation Group. This Group brings together various communities to help in the development, testing and co-creation of digital government services.

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It is made up of representatives from communities such as: seniors and youths, persons with disabilities, low-income families, clan associations and SMEs. They will help our tech teams by providing inputs on community needs at the onset.

I am happy to share that 15 community groups have signed up to be part of this Group. We hope more will do the same, come forward and provide a voice for their communities.

Smart Nation Builder

In the coming days, you might notice a roving truck that will transform into a digital playground when deployed. This is our newly launched Smart Nation Builder!

It will visit community spaces and heartlands to engage Singaporeans on Smart Nation initiatives and collect feedback on digital tools. Its purpose is for us to finetune the user experience and identify gaps in service delivery so that we can enjoy greater convenience. For those here today, you can visit the Smart Nation Builder later at Level 1. And please share your feedback.

Conclusion

To conclude, this year, the Smart Nation and Digital Government Group will turn five. It is timely that this appreciation event for our Smart Nation Ambassadors is one of the first events on our calendar. We appreciate the time and energy each of you have contributed, and we hope you continue to partner us to develop Singapore as a Smart Nation.

Together, we can make the way we live, work and play here something that the world aspires to have. Thank you and enjoy the rest of today's programme.

Mrs Josephine Teo

Minister for Communications and Information,
and Minister-in-charge of Smart Nation and Cybersecurity

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