

CTPCLP Admission Essay Questions (AY17/18)

Please answer both the following questions, *each* with an essay of between 600 to 800 words. We are looking for responses that display clarity of thought, a passion for working with the community, and an understanding of social issues in Singapore.

Essay Question 1

In a recent survey of voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs, the commonly-used term for local charities that provide social services), 8 in 10 of them felt that the name VWO should be replaced, with alternatives such as “social service organisations” (see Annex). What are your views? And how have your own experiences with local VWOs been like, be it positive or negative? Do you also think that students’ voluntary efforts for social causes often termed as “community service” or “service learning” should also be rebranded?

Essay Question 2

What positive qualities do you have, which had contributed towards your past community involvement efforts? What areas of personal growth do you also hope to obtain from your participation in the Chua Thian Poh Community Leadership Programme?

Drop VWO label, say players in social service field

The terms 'voluntary' and 'welfare' prevent a rethink of their roles

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What is in a name? According to a frequently referenced line in the play *Romeo And Juliet* by William Shakespeare, "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet".

But charities in Singapore – officially known as voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) – disagree.

Eight in 10 of them feel that the VWO label should be thrown out, according to a poll done at the Social Service Summit held at Marina Bay Sands Expo and Convention Centre yesterday. The summit was organised by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS), which oversees all VWOs here.

A third of these VWOs proposed that they be called "social service organisations" instead, while others were split between terms such as "social purpose enterprises" and "social purpose organisations".

Players in the social service sector said that there is more to the name change than a cosmetic tweak. In a panel discussion at the summit, Nominated MP Chia Yong Yong, who is also president of SPD, a charity that works with people with disabilities, said what is at stake is not just a quibble over names, but a re-examination of the role of charities in modern Singapore.

Ms Chia said that in the old charity culture, there was an "I help you" mindset, in which benefi-

ciaries were being helped, and this created a sense of helplessness and dependency among these people.

"Calling ourselves VWOs accentuates the notion of 'welfare', and I think it is about time that we change the way we think about who we are and why we exist," she added.

The term "VWO" is problematic for many people in the social service sector because "voluntary" does not bring across the professionalism needed in the sector, and "welfare" may prompt notions of giving handouts and of passive recipients instead of empowering individuals.

Ms Chia argued that the VWO title also affects the business models that charities adopt – or the lack thereof.

"The charity tag has become a burden to us. We are shy to make money. There is nothing wrong with making money because it helps us to run our programmes and serve our clients better.

"So, we need to be able to change that mindset, where those who can pay for services should pay for them," said Ms Chia.

A fellow panel member, Singapore Muslim Women's Association chief executive officer Mohd Ali Mahmood, noted that VWOs might be hesitant about being associated with commercial interests because only 10 per cent of respondents in the conference said they preferred to be called "social service enterprises".

MINDSET CHANGE NEEDED

The charity tag has become a burden to us. We are shy to make money. There is nothing wrong with making money because it helps us to run our programmes and serve our clients better. So, we need to be able to change that mindset, where those who can pay for services should pay for them.



NOMINATED MP CHIA YONG YONG, who is also president of SPD, on the changing role of charities in modern Singapore.

In a speech at the conference, Minister for Social and Family Development Tan Chuan-Jin urged charities to be more enterprising.

"Our sector will benefit significantly if we have an enterprising spirit. We do not need to take wholesale the way businesses are driven and become profit-driven, but we do want to be effective and productive, so that we can do our jobs better on a more sustainable basis in the long haul," said Mr Tan.

NCSS has taken the lead with the name change by using the term "social service organisation" instead of VWO in all its talks and marketing collateral since last year, when its president spoke about the issue at the inaugural Social Service Summit.

NCSS deputy chief executive Tina Hung said: "We don't want to be prescriptive about it, but this is an important conversation to have. The sector has gone beyond the mere provision of direct services to include other players – from companies to social enterprises to funders – and the new name needs to reflect that."

Abroad, VWOs are more commonly known as charities, non-profit organisations or non-governmental organisations.

Dr Marissa Medjeral-Mills, executive director of the Disabled People's Association, said the discussion over nomenclature resembles the association's efforts over the years to get people to use terms that give dignity to people with disabilities, such as referring to a person on a wheelchair as a "wheelchair user" instead of being "wheelchair-bound".

"People sometimes say that we are moving towards political correctness and we should just focus on doing the actual work, but terminology can have a much deeper impact than you think," said Dr Medjeral-Mills.

"In using the term 'welfare', it does not just affect the users but also the professionals in the field. It does not change their mindset regarding collaborating with users to try to find out what they want instead of just providing a service to a recipient of charity.

"Terminology is the first step, then we need to change how we do things to align with the vision."

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