

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**20 Oct 2017**

**Building Communities That Understand How to Live Well and Leave Well**

BOTH SIDES, NOW is returning in 2017 with an innovative arts-based, community-centric approach that aims to build end-of-life (EOL) friendly communities where individuals and families are supported in making informed decisions about EOL plans. The latest edition of this community engagement project about EOL issues will have a multi-year presence in two different communities — Chong Pang and Telok Blangah.

This is the first time such an initiative will be undertaken at this scale and for this length of time and has been specially designed to engage communities on this topic at a deeper level.

In a 2014 survey on Death Attitudes in Singapore commissioned by the Lien Foundation, 71% of the respondents saw the need for a national conversation on death and dying. EOL carries significant financial, social and emotional costs, and there is an urgent need to raise public awareness about these issues as well as advance care planning.

This project is co-presented by the Lien Foundation, Ang Chin Moh Foundation, Drama Box and ArtsWok Collaborative, in collaboration with community partners Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (Wellness Kampung) and Montfort Care (Good Death Programme).

**FOCUS ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Co-producer Ngiam Su-Lin explained that while the previous editions of BOTH SIDES, NOW involved planting seeds of awareness about EOL-related issues, there was little opportunity for sustaining them over a longer period of time. She said : “Audiences mentioned wanting more opportunities to have conversations on these issues, as well as learn skills on how to broach these issues. They also had questions on how and where to access services related to advance care planning.”

To make this initiative more sustainable, there is now a focus on building the capacity of volunteers to become community advocates, and create resources that community service organisations can continue to use after the project ends.

Facilitating connections among stakeholders such as family members, neighbours, and community service organisations will also enable long-term engagement within these communities. These community partnerships provide residents access to relevant services, and can help to ensure the continuity of the project goals.

## **CREATING A CULTURAL SHIFT**

Facilitating the acceptance of death and dying as a normal part of one's life cycle requires a broader cultural shift, and the arts has the power to change perspectives and open minds. Throughout this process of community engagement, the primacy of sharing stories and listening with empathy will feature strongly.

Kok Heng Leun, the Artistic Director of the project said: "We are now living in a society where people want to express themselves. But we also need people to listen. Most of the time, we pretend to hear, but we do not listen. We must listen with our eyes, our ears, our body. We need to give full attention to the person who is speaking, who wants to be listened to."

Through specially designed arts-based experiences, participants – seniors, volunteers, residents, community partners – will have a safe space to rehearse and practise the skills of engaged listening, which will hopefully lead to deeper reflection, shifts in old beliefs and values, and the inspiration to act on new understanding.

Activities that will enable EOL issues to be seen and heard on multiple levels of engagement will include performances, participatory art, dialogues, and workshops. The artists involved are theatre practitioner Han Xuemei, visual artists Alecia Neo and Shirley Soh, film-maker Ng Kin Kia Jasmine, multidisciplinary artist Angie Seah, and dramaturg Charlene Rajendran. They will facilitate workshops with seniors to create artworks on EOL-related issues, and these will be shared with the wider public at both sites.

## **ENDURING PARTNERSHIPS**

BOTH SIDES, NOW began in 2013, with an immersive arts experience at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital. In 2014, the message was brought out into the heartlands of Khatib and Toa Payoh, with public engagement through participatory arts activities, installations, and dialogue sessions. From 2014 to 2016, a more general outreach was attained through puppetry performances that were staged at 50 senior centres across Singapore.

From the beginning, the Lien Foundation and Ang Chin Moh Foundation have been invaluable partners for this initiative. "We struggle with death because we don't engage it enough. BOTH SIDES, NOW has created opportunities for communities to reflect on and discuss this topic in a safe environment without fear," said Lee Poh Wah, CEO of the Lien Foundation. "Attitudes, culture and social norms on death take a long time to change. For effective public outreach, we need long-term commitment and ownership from the government and the community. A whole-of-society approach is needed to promote wellbeing at the end of life, so we can live well and leave well."

Ang Ziqian, founder of the Ang Chin Moh Foundation said: "Discussing what we want now when we are of sound body and mind can give our loved ones comfort, because

they then know they can fulfill our last wishes. If we truly care for our loved ones, we must take steps when we are alive to leave behind love, not regrets. In my 20-plus years as a funeral professional, I have seen so many grief stricken families still unsure if they did the right thing after the funeral.”

## **COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS**

In this new edition of **BOTH SIDES, NOW**, introducing community members to the concept of Advance Care Planning will remain a key thrust. This has also been identified as an important need by the community partners in this project.

Wellness Kampung is a wellness and care centre for seniors run by Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH). Evon Chua, Manager, Population Health at KTPH said: "Over the years, we have encountered more individuals coming forward to share their thoughts on death and dying. It has encouraged and helped us realise the importance of continuing to build a strong community support network. We hope to raise awareness of EOL care and this partnership with **BOTH SIDES, NOW** helps create a fresh avenue where the young and old can come together to explore what that truly means."

Mark Lin, Lead Social Worker of Montfort Care, explained: "Death avoidance is a very real phenomenon, and getting people to think about these issues is a very long process. Partners such as like **BOTH SIDES, NOW** can help provide death-positive programmes in the community to reduce the death taboo and change the way we view death. Once people see early planning for EOL as a natural part of life, much like retirement planning or buying insurance, then getting people to plan ahead will be so much easier."

Members of the public interested in finding out more, and doing Advance Care Planning (ACP) can visit [www.livingmatters.sg](http://www.livingmatters.sg). Find out more about community-based ACP resources and services at <http://www.bothsidesnow.sg/resources-end-of-life-issues>.

## **PROJECT LAUNCH**

The first wave of our community engagement this month will kick off with **THE WIND CAME HOME**, a heartwarming puppetry performance about an elderly couple struggling to make end-of-life choices. It will be staged from 18-21 October in Chong Pang, and from 25-29 October and 1-5 November in Telok Blangah.

In November, there will be a series of **HOW DO YOU SAY IT?** talks and workshops in Telok Blangah. Participants will learn about EOL issues ranging from medical and legal concerns to emotional and social needs, and pick up skills to talk about them with their loved ones.

**For time and venue details, please refer to:**

<http://bothsidesnow.sg/whatson-the-wind-came-home.html>

<http://bothsidesnow.sg/whatson-workshop.html>

**For BOTH SIDES, NOW activities in 2018 and 2019, please refer to ANNEX A.**

**Photos are available at <https://tinyurl.com/bsn2017-photos>**

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#### **ABOUT THE LIEN FOUNDATION**

[www.lienfoundation.org](http://www.lienfoundation.org)

The Lien Foundation is a Singapore philanthropic house noted for its model of radical philanthropy. It breaks new ground by investing in innovative solutions, convening strategic partnerships and catalysing action on social and environmental challenges. The Foundation seeks to foster exemplary early childhood education, excellence in eldercare and effective environmental sustainability in water and sanitation. It supports innovative models of eldercare, advocate better care for the dying and greater attention on dementia care.

In its mission to advance eldercare, the Foundation advocates better care of the dying. One of its flagship programmes, the Life Before Death initiative, was first conceived in 2006 to create greater public awareness about end-of-life issues in Singapore. It sought to de-stigmatise death and dying by spurring various 'dialogues' with the use of social media, art, films and photography and advocacy through research. Creative projects such as the Happy Coffins, The Last Outfit, Obitcheery, Both Sides, Now and "Die Die Must Say" getai got people to confront their mortality in unconventional ways.

The Foundation has commissioned two global Quality of Death indices, the latest ranking 80 countries on their provision of end-of-life care. It has published research that unveiled the views of doctors and thought leaders on what would improve end-of-life care in Singapore.

## **ABOUT ANG CHIN MOH FOUNDATION**

[www.acmfoundation.sg](http://www.acmfoundation.sg)

The Ang Chin Moh Foundation is an independent, non-profit organisation founded by Ang Chin Moh Funeral Directors to commemorate its 100-year heritage in Singapore. The Foundation's aims include enhancing the public perception of death, bereavement and the deathcare profession, and help advance philanthropy in this direction. Towards this end, the Foundation supported fundamental public education programs such as the global *Design for Death* competition to present innovative designs and concepts for deathcare in the future; *Hospitable Hospice* – a study presented to make hospices a better place to live in; *Die Die Must Say* – getai performances taken to the heartlands getting people to challenge their own thoughts on dying and death through dark humor; and supporting tertiary students presenting deathcare concepts as their final project studies.

## **ABOUT DRAMA BOX**

[www.dramabox.org](http://www.dramabox.org)

Founded in 1990, Drama Box is a non-profit company known for creating theatre that inspires dialogue, reflection and change. A big part of Drama Box's work is in bringing theatre to the community so that everyone can have the means to access and participate. By shining a spotlight on marginalised narratives and making space for the communal contemplation of complex issues, they seek to tell stories that provoke a deeper understanding of Singapore's culture, history and identity.

Drama Box is a recipient of the National Arts Council's Major Grant 2017 - 2020. They are also a member of the Singapore Chinese Language Theatre Alliance.

## **ABOUT ARTSWOK COLLABORATIVE**

[www.artswok.org](http://www.artswok.org)

ArtsWok Collaborative is an arts-based community development organisation that connects communities by harnessing the power of the arts to create dialogue, invite social participation and build bridges across difference. We work with multidisciplinary teams to design and implement community-based arts projects, facilitate learning and exchanges through a community of practice, build capacity of practitioners through an action learning-incubator programme as well as conduct research and advocacy in the field of arts-based community development.

ArtsWok Collaborative Limited is a recipient of the National Arts Council's Seed Grant for the period from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2018.

## **ANNEX A: PROJECT TIMELINE FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

### THE WIND CAME HOME

*Puppetry performance*

18 – 21 Oct 2017 @ Chong Pang

25 – 29 Oct 2017, 1 – 5 Nov 2017 @ Telok Blangah

A loving elderly couple's golden years together are interrupted when the husband finds out he has cancer. He starts planning for the care of his wife who has dementia even as he struggles with his own fears about dying. What choices will he make?

### HOW DO YOU SAY IT?

*Talks and Workshops*

Part 1: 28 & 29 Oct, 4 & 5 Nov 2017

Part 2: 11, 12 & 18 Nov 2017

@ Telok Blangah

This two-part programme is for anyone aged 18 years and above who wants to learn how to have end-of-life conversations with loved ones. Participants can take part as an individual or attend with family and friends, and can expect to learn about end-of-life issues from medical and legal concerns to emotional and social needs, and the skills on how to talk about these issues with loved ones.

### EXIT

*Forum Theatre*

March 2018 @ Chong Pang and Telok Blangah

This interactive performance tells the story of two families struggling to cope as they confront illness and death. Could they have handled things better? Audience members are invited to stop the action, jump in and change the outcome of the play.

### HOW DO YOU SAY IT?

*Talks and Workshops*

March/April 2018 @ Telok Blangah

This two-part programme is for anyone aged 18 years and above who wants to learn how to have end-of-life conversations with loved ones. Participants can take part as an individual or attend with family and friends, and can expect to learn about end-of-life issues from medical and legal concerns to emotional and social needs, and the skills on how to talk about these issues with loved ones.

LEGACY (working title)

*Arts Installation*

Sept 2018 @ Chong Pang

A group of seniors will be working with four different artists – Shirley Soh, Alecia Neo, Han Xuemei and Jasmine Ng – in a series of workshops to create artworks. Through this process, the seniors will get clarity on their values, what's important to them and how they would like to spend their remaining days. The seniors will express their thoughts and wishes through the artworks they create, which will be installed and presented around the neighbourhood, to generate conversations within the wider community about end-of-life issues.

THE ART OF DYING (working title)

*Participatory Theatre*

Sept 2018 @ Chong Pang and Telok Blangah

This is a participatory theatre programme where audience members are guided through an experimental process of learning through active listening, advocating and negotiating difficult issues with other stakeholders in their community. The audience-participants will enter a scenario where they will dialogue about end-of-life considerations, how a personal choice can affect family members, friends and the greater community. Through this process, they will be triggered to start thinking about how they would prepare for their death in the context of their unique situation.

HOW DO YOU SAY IT?

*Talks and Workshops*

Sept/Oct 2018 @ Telok Blangah

This two-part programme is for anyone aged 18 years and above who wants to learn how to have end-of-life conversations with loved ones. Participants can take part as an individual or attend with family and friends, and can expect to learn about end-of-life issues from medical and legal concerns to emotional and social needs, and the skills on how to talk about these issues with loved ones.

IMMERSIVE ARTS EXPERIENCE

July 2019 @ Telok Blangah

This multi-disciplinary arts engagement festival will take place in GoLi – The Moving Theatre, and comprise performances, activities, talks and artworks created by artists as well as the seniors of Telok Blangah after going through workshops facilitated by

the artists on our creative team, i.e. Shirley Soh, Angie Seah, Alecia Neo, Jasmine Ng and Han Xuemei. By engaging with community members as well as a wider public, we hope to encourage candid discussions on end-of-life matters, create acceptance of death and dying as a normal part of one's life cycle, and help equip individuals with skills to have end-of-life conversations with their family and loved ones.