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## Talking about death is a community and family affair

***Lien Foundation and Ang Chin Moh Foundation bring BOTH SIDES, NOW, an immersive arts experience to the Singapore heartlands of Nee Soon South and Toa Payoh Central***

***Support from the government and community partners affirms drive for public awareness on end-of-life matters***

19 September 2014. Singapore

1. This September, the public is invited to a fair to talk, think and share what they feel about life and death. The neighbourhoods of Nee Soon South and Toa Payoh Central will offer them an experiential chance to explore and delve into the topics of living and dying. This will be done through fun and creative ways like participatory arts activities, dialogues, film, theatre and puppetry performances.
2. **BOTH SIDES, NOW – Living with Dying** is an immersive arts experience presented by the **Lien Foundation** and **Ang Chin Moh Foundation**, and produced by Drama Box and ArtsWok. Taking place on 19 to 21 September 2014 at Nee Soon South near Khatib MRT Station and 26 to 28 September 2014 at Toa Payoh Central, the fair seeks to provide a platform for individuals and families to reflect on important end-of-life matters, imagine the end-of-life journey and be empowered to express their own end-of-life choices.

### **Pent-up demand for public die-logues**

3. “The positive and encouraging response to our recent ‘Die Die Must Say’ getai initiative affirmed the receptiveness and readiness of the public towards talking about the end of life,” said Mr Lee Poh Wah, CEO of Lien Foundation. “BOTH SIDES, NOW continues to engage the public with a platform to share memories, evoke emotional connections and gain a better awareness of end-of-life issues. Dying can be a messy and distressing family affair; and the arts is used to give it meaning, dignity, and beauty.”
4. This is the second run of BOTH SIDES, NOW. It was held at the Khoo Teck Puat Hospital last November where 8,000 people participated in the installation and performances. The positive

response prompted the two Foundations to bring it to the HDB heartlands this year. A new series of pre-event puppetry performances called “The Wind Came Home” were introduced at 18 eldercare centres in the Northern and Central parts of Singapore. Mr Ang Ziqian, Founder of Ang Chin Moh Foundation said, “This time, we are engaging the elderly directly and inviting them to reflect about living, dying and the funeral that they want. After the pre-event puppetry performances, they are asked to share and discuss their thoughts. Using the arts as a channel, we hope to give them the impetus to start such conversations with their family and friends.”

5. The voices of some of the elderly participants of the puppetry performances are now a permanent part of BOTH SIDES, NOW. Their portraits and thoughts on life lessons feature prominently as one of the artworks on display. Having experienced how the puppetry performances engaged the elderly in end-of-life conversations, professional caregivers at the 18 eldercare centres are now better empowered to broach these topics with the elderly.
6. Ms Irene Ho, Centre Manager of House of Joy, one of the 18 eldercare centres involved in the pre-engagement activities, agreed, “The puppetry performance was entertaining and thought-provoking. It created many opportunities for the elderly to give more thought to important end-of-life matters. It also helped us become more aware of the concerns they might have about death and dying. This allows us to speak with them about it in greater detail and with more sensitivity.”

#### **Using the arts to confront mortality**

7. “Growing, living, aging and dying are part of the natural course of life, but as a society we have avoided talking about dying,” said Mr Kok Heng Leun, Artistic Director of BOTH SIDES, NOW. “Through the artworks, we’ve created a safe space for the public to encounter the topics of living and dying in a non-threatening yet thought-provoking manner. The shared stories and experiences facilitated through this immersive arts experience bring the community together on a common platform to address the question of mortality.”

#### **Growing community partnerships to ramp up end-of-life awareness**

8. Supporting the Foundations’ move to bring BOTH SIDES, NOW to the community are the Arts Fund, National Arts Council, Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Alexandra Health System, North West Community Development Council, Nee Soon South Citizens’ Consultative Committee, Nee Soon South Community Arts and Culture Club, Toa Payoh Community Arts and Culture Club, and the

Ministry of Health. This consortium of partners from the government, hospitals, the arts and social sector signals the growing importance and need for end-of-life awareness and discussions.

9. On the importance of community involvement, Mr Lee said, “Culture, attitudes and social norms about the end of life takes time to change. To enhance the effectiveness of this outreach, we need a reframing of the issues, positive offerings, and most importantly, collective ownership by the community and government to improve awareness on end-of-life matters”.
10. Joining the effort are 70 volunteer facilitators as they do their part in encouraging end-of-life discussions at BOTH SIDES, NOW. They were mobilised through the networks of our partner organisations, various community interest groups and the general public. Mr Lu Kee Hong, who is volunteering for the second year in a row, said, “Volunteering for BOTH SIDES, NOW has made me realise the need to have this important conversation with my parents and my family. While not everyone is ready to talk about what they want at the end of life, for those who are, the arts can really help to open up a difficult conversation.”
11. To better equip them, BOTH SIDES, NOW volunteer-facilitators have undergone the Advance Care Planning (ACP) Advocates training conducted by the Agency for Integrated Care and healthcare professionals from Khoo Teck Puat Hospital. ACP is the process of planning for one’s future health and personal care. It includes discussing one’s personal beliefs and goals for care with loved ones and healthcare providers. Tan Tock Seng Hospital and Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, two hospitals serving the areas where the immersive arts experience will be held, will also be the referral point for seniors from the 18 eldercare centres who are interested in completing an ACP after participating in the pre-engagement puppetry performances.
12. Additionally, North West CDC has also organised a talk on ACP for about 80 of their Welfare Volunteers and Voluntary Welfare Organisation (VWO) partners. They will also be providing free transport to WVOs in the North West District who wish to bring their residents to participate in the immersive arts experience, and in the process increase their awareness of end-of-life matters.

### **A fair for the young and old**

13. The artworks in BOTH SIDES, NOW can be appreciated by audiences of different ages. “We have made the activities fun and creative to encourage participation and reflection from all ages,

individually or with family and friends. It would be great to experience the artworks with people in our lives, and engage in meaningful conversations about our life wishes,” said Ngiam Su-Lin, Director, ArtsWok. “For example, the ‘Life Journey’ artwork invites them to visually chart their high and low points in life, and ponder about how these events have influenced their perspectives and values, while the paper craft miniature coffin in the ‘This is Not a Coffin’ artwork challenges participants to reimagine their final resting place. Even though death is ultimately an individual experience, dying impacts those around us and the communities we exist in.”

14. Besides the arts activities and installations, the audience can also participate in a forum theatre performance, catch a thought-provoking puppetry performance and join speakers from different walks of life, including healthcare professionals from Tan Tock Seng Hospital and Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, as they share their insights on living and dying. There will also be informative talks about the basics of a Lasting Power of Attorney and writing a Will.

### **Engage on Social Media**

15. Members of the public can also post their own stories on living with dying and photos taken at BOTH SIDES, NOW on their favorite social media platforms via hashtag #bothsidesnowsg

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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.

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 ‘die-logues’ 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 own mortality in unconventional ways.

The initiative has since gone beyond Singapore. In 2010, the Foundation commissioned the first-ever global Quality of Death index ranking 40 countries on their provision of end-of-life care. In 2013, the Foundation launched the inaugural international Design for Death competition that presented innovations in deathcare for the future.

**ABOUT ANG CHIN MOH FOUNDATION****[www.acmfoundation.sg](http://www.acmfoundation.sg)**

The Ang Chin Moh Foundation is an independent, non-profit organisation formed by Ang Chin Moh Funeral Directors in commemoration of its 100-year heritage. The Foundation aims to enhance the perception of death and bereavement among the public, uplift the deathcare profession with professional training and education, and advance philanthropy in this area. The Ang Chin Moh Foundation also aims to champion and preserve the heritage of funeral and bereavement services in Singapore.

**About DRAMA BOX****[www.dramabox.org](http://www.dramabox.org)**

Drama Box is a non-profit contemporary theatre company with charity status. Formed in 1990, it has since gained a respectable reputation for presenting works that raises social awareness and inculcates civic responsibility amongst Singaporeans. Our productions are fun and entertaining, yet thought provoking and reflective. Drama Box's mission is to create, present and curate AESTHETICALLY COMPELLING THEATRE with a BROAD SOCIAL REACH, through DEEP AND INTIMATE ENGAGEMENT.

Our works engage dialogically with the people and their socio-political conditions. We want audience to be stimulated by the aesthetic experience, provoked to think about the issues presented, and participate actively in our works as "Spec-Actors" or "Creators". Drama Box Ltd is a recipient of the National Arts Council's Major Grant for the period from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2016.

**About ARTSWOK****[www.artswok.com](http://www.artswok.com) | [www.facebook.com/artswok](http://www.facebook.com/artswok)**

ArtsWok is a consultancy that seeks to bring art-making and community building together in a meaningful way. Our vision is to see communities thrive, and we facilitate change by enabling communities to express their identity, concerns and aspirations through the language of the arts.

We work with multi-disciplinary teams and engage stakeholders from various sectors to design and implement arts-based civic engagement projects as well as pilot innovative therapeutic arts programmes in community settings. ArtsWok convenes a community of practice, conducts networking and training as well as research and advocacy in the field of arts-based community development.

ArtsWok is Ko Siew Huey and Ngiam Su-Lin. Huey brings her training and experience in the fields of media and communications, film, international development, and public policy while Su-Lin's background is in theatre and drama-in-education, company management and producing, counseling, and community work.

**Annex A – Scheduled Activities at BOTH SIDES, NOW (Daily):**

<p><b>10.00am – 10.00pm</b></p>	<p><b>Participatory Arts Activities &amp; Installations</b> (See Annex B)</p>
<p><b>11.00am, 2.00pm &amp; 5.00pm</b> (Only at 2.00pm &amp; 5.00pm on 19 Sept 2014)</p>	<p><b>Dialogues</b> Join our speakers from different walks of life and hear them talk About end-of-life issues that concern you.</p> <p>From the practical to the personal, listen to their stories and insights. Get educated, be touched and begin action.</p>
<p><b>6.30pm – 7.00pm</b></p>	<p><b>Puppetry Performance : The Wind Came Home</b></p> <p>This puppetry performance, as seen through the eyes of a stray cat, tells the story of an elderly couple struggling to make difficult end-of-life choices.</p> <p>When Mr. Lim is diagnosed with cancer, he has to plan for the care of his wife who suffers from dementia as well as confront his own fears about dying.</p>
<p><b>7.30pm – 9.00pm</b></p>	<p><b>Forum Theatre : Exit</b></p> <p>This interactive performance tells the story of two families struggling to cope as they confront illness and death.</p> <p>Could they have handled things better?</p> <p>Audience members are invited to stop the action, jump in and change the outcome of the play.</p> <p>Join us in this rehearsal for life.</p>
<p><b>9.00pm – 10.00pm</b></p>	<p><b>Community Conversations</b></p> <p>At the end of each day, sit around a table and have a chat with those around you on the topic of living with dying.</p> <p>We've got tea and snacks so let the conversations flow!</p>

## **Annex B - Participatory Arts Activities & Installations (10.00am – 10.00pm)**

### **1. Life Lessons**

Through this photo installation, seniors give their candid and personal take on the question, “What is the most important lesson Life has taught you?”

### **2. A Life Remembered**

Take stock of the trajectory of your life and imagine what your legacy will be. How would you like to leave your mark on this world?

### **3. Time of Our Lives**

Is life measured in minutes or memories? In this video installation, read the body like a book to reveal the story of a life.

### **4. Life Journey : Ups and Downs**

Chart the high and low points in your life. How have these events shaped your understanding about living? Where would you place yourself now on this journey?

### **5. Rest.Stop**

A coffee shop, a living room, a coffin: Immerse yourself in these different spaces and be prompted by voices and sounds to take on alternative perspectives when reflecting on dying.

### **6. This Is Not A Coffin**

If you could design a coffin as a symbol of rest, what would it be?

### **7. Turn Turn Turn**

At the end of your life, what will make it easier to accept death? Write or draw your answers on a pinwheel and let them blow in the wind.

### **8. My Message to Death**

If death was a person, what would you say? On your own, or in a group, write death a message and share it with your photo.

## Annex C – Schedule of speakers for ‘Dialogues’

### NEE SOON SOUTH

*Basketball Court (in front of Blk 838, Yishun Street 81)*

Date	Time	Speakers	Synopsis
19 Sept	2 PM	Dr. Raymond Ng, Alan Ng & Melvin Ong  Tan Tock Seng Hospital   English & Mandarin	In the seasons of life, dying and death are inevitable encounters. In journeying with the terminally ill, there may be opportunities for deep reflection, life lessons and even celebration.  A doctor, a volunteer and a family caregiver share their personal experiences in their journeys as well as reflections on living well and leaving well.
	5 PM	Patrick Tan  Law Society of Singapore   Mandarin	As we live in a world full of uncertainties, it is important and necessary for us to plan for our future today.  Many of us wait until it is too late, not because we do not want to do anything about it but because we are unaware of our choices or what we can do.  In this informative talk, we will share with you what a will is, and its advantages and disadvantages, as well as real case studies of problems encountered in the absence of a will; and what is a Lasting Power of Attorney.
20 Sept	11 AM	Stephanie Hong  Law Society of Singapore   English	Serious illnesses and accidents can lead to mental incapacity or coma, and old age may result in dementia. Any of these scenarios may affect our ability or those of our loved ones in making decisions and handling our finances.  When we leave this world, do we want to make it simpler for our loved ones to handle our affairs, and avoid disputes amongst family members?  Learn the basics of a LPA and a Will, how they work and more importantly, how they apply to us.
	5 PM	Sim Lai Kiow  Khoo Teck Puat Hospital   English	A palliative care nurse distills lessons from the death of her mother, as well as other patients and caregivers to advocate and facilitate advance care plans, and to help patients come to terms with dying.
21 Sept	11 AM	Linda Chua  Caregiver   English	A former caregiver talks about providing care for her late mum who had dementia as well as liver cancer.  Her journey was one of coming to acceptance and learning how to provide care positively and with lots of laughter and joy, and then coping with the loss of a loved one.  These caregiving lessons will be distilled and shared with the public in the hope of helping and encouraging others.



21 Sept	2 PM	Chan Tuck Wai  National University of Singapore   Mandarin	What is a good death? How can we achieve “a good death” for ourselves? How can we help others when they are dying?  We know that death is certain but the time of death is uncertain. How well can we prepare for the dying process? This dialogue session will involve sharing and discussing interesting experiences in palliative care and areas concerning respect, dignity and autonomy.
	5 PM	Ang Ziqian  Ang Chin Moh Foundation   Mandarin & English	A funeral director talks about his years growing up in a family business surrounded by taboos and misconceptions. He shares lessons on life gained from his years helping families prepare for their loved ones’ final rite of passage.

## TOA PAYOH CENTRAL

*In front of Toa Payoh Library*

Date	Time	Speakers	Synopsis
26 Sept	11 AM	Lester Lee & Dr Wu Huei Yaw  Dover Park Hospice   English & Mandarin	When people are living with a life-threatening illness, the focus of care can be shifted from curative to comfort so that patients have an opportunity to live with dignity, and live as fully as possible in the last stage of life.  This dialogue session aims to give an introduction to palliative care provided by Dover Park Hospice and will allow participants to have a better understanding and appreciation of this vital type of care.
	2 PM	Dr. Raymond Ng, Alan Ng & Melvin Ong  Tan Tock Seng Hospital   English & Mandarin	In the seasons of life, dying and death are inevitable encounters. In journeying with the terminally ill, there may be opportunities for deep reflection, life lessons and even celebration.  A doctor, a volunteer and a family caregiver share their personal experiences in their journeys as well as reflections on living well and leaving well.
	5 PM	Herbert Teo  Ang Chin Moh Foundation   English	This dialogue session will touch on how the landscape of communicating about dying, death and funerals amongst Singaporeans is taking a positive turn, and the importance of this in helping everyone broach this sensitive but significant topic that impacts all.
27 Sept	2 PM	Sim Lai Kiow  Khoo Teck Puat Hospital   Chinese	A palliative care nurse distils lessons from the death of her mother, as well as other patients and caregivers to advocate and facilitate advance care plans, and to help patients come to terms with dying.

27 Sept	5 PM	Chan Tuck Wai  National University of Singapore   English	<p>What is a good death? How can we achieve “a good death” for ourselves? How can we help others when they are dying?</p> <p>We know that death is certain but the time of death is uncertain. How well can we prepare for the dying process? This dialogue session will involve sharing and discussing interesting experiences in palliative care and areas concerning respect, dignity and autonomy.</p>
28 Sept	11 AM	Lynette Ng  Khoo Teck Puat Hospital   English	<p>Children are often excluded from discussions about end-of-life when they have family members who are terminally ill, as older family members typically believe that children do not understand death and/or cannot cope with it.</p> <p>Are these perceptions accurate? This dialogue session invites discussion on this topic by reflecting on patients and families that the speaker has journeyed with in her career.</p>
	2 PM	Patrick Tan  Law Society of Singapore   Mandarin	<p>As we live in a world full of uncertainties, it is important and necessary for us to plan for our future today. Many of us wait until it is too late, not because we do not want to do anything about it but because we are unaware of our choices or what we can do.</p> <p>In this informative talk, we will share with you what a will is, and its advantages and disadvantages, as well as real case studies of problems encountered in the absence of a will; and what is a Lasting Power of Attorney.</p>
	5 PM	Sister Geraldine Tan  St Joseph’s Home   English	<p>A pioneer of the hospice movement in Singapore gives her take on the question : “What is a good death?”</p>