



## **SUBORDINATE COURTS MEDIA RELEASE**

### **MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMUNITY JUSTICE CENTRE**

On 20 June 2012, the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, Ministry of Law, Subordinate Courts, Tan Chin Tuan Foundation, and The Law Society of Singapore entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish a Community Justice Centre that seeks to assist unrepresented litigants through its services.

#### **The Community Justice Centre (CJC)**

2 The Patron of the CJC shall be The Honourable the Chief Justice Chan Sek Keong. To be located at the Subordinate Courts, the CJC will commence operation by the fourth quarter of 2012. In its initial years, the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation will provide ‘seed’ funding.

3 The CJC will provide the following services:

- (a) Legal clinics;
- (b) Lay Assistance Scheme;
- (c) Information services;
- (d) Practical support services;
- (e) Referral services; and
- (f) Public outreach services.

4 More details of these services are available at Annex A.

#### **Rationale For the Establishment of the CJC**

5 A large number of court users appearing before the Subordinate Courts are not represented by lawyers. It is essential to ensure that these self-represented litigants understand the legal jargon and labyrinth of legal rules, present their case and cross-examine witnesses properly and effectively, and understand judicial rulings in their cases. Without assistance to navigate the legal and judicial process, it is possible that some within this group may be disadvantaged.

6 While justice may still be done, it may not be seen to be done if Litigants-in-Person (LIPs) are unable to effectively understand and participate in the legal process. They may feel that they were not given a fair hearing or were unjustly deprived of their rights.

7 A wide variety of programmes to assist LIPs has been developed over the years. In light of the large number and proportion of LIPs, coupled with the need to ensure that the justice system remains accessible to LIPs, it is timely to establish an integrated one-stop hub that would provide various support services for LIPs in need, including referral services to existing programmes. The CJC is envisaged to assist unrepresented litigants towards this end.

### **CJC – A Community Partnership**

8 The CJC is a community partnership between the public sector, the philanthropic sector, and the legal profession to render assistance to LIPs in need. Besides the MOU signatories, M/s Allen & Gledhill LLP will also assist to incorporate the CJC as a Company Limited by Guarantee (with status as an Institution of a Public Character) on a *pro bono* basis. Volunteer lawyers play a critical role in offering LIPs legal advice at the legal clinics. So do volunteers of the Lay Assistance Scheme who attend Court with indigent LIPs in need to provide them with essential practical help and emotional support. The success of the CJC does not only depend on these pioneering institutions; the CJC will also require the support of volunteers for its programmes and services. Said the Chief District Judge of the Subordinate Courts, Mr Tan Siong Thye:

*“People involved in cases before the courts are understandably anxious and concerned; the indigent litigants-in-person need help in pursuing their matters, or in dealing with moving on with their lives. Volunteers play a crucial role in making sure that these court users not only obtain justice, but can make use of the fruits of justice in their lives.”*

9 Individuals and organisations are encouraged to join hands with the CJC and be a part of this collaborative effort to serve the needs of LIPs and provide them with access to justice. Interested parties may contact [SUBCT\\_Registrar@subct.gov.sg](mailto:SUBCT_Registrar@subct.gov.sg) for information on volunteering at the CJC.

10 On the establishment of the CJC, Mr Chew Kwee San, Council Member of the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation, said:

*"This is a compelling cause deserving of support as it is intended to benefit the less advantaged across Singapore and resonates with the Foundation's objective. Unrepresented, needy litigants would be offered help to navigate the court system more confidently, calmly and with adequate knowledge and facts. In particular, for those with limited means, who face language barriers, and are victims of poverty or are marginalised, timely legal referral to guide them would better help them solve their legal issues. This integrated, not-for-profit, one-stop model - offering informational referral services, legal clinics, trial preparation assistance, form filling assistance, public outreach and educational programmes - streamlines the type of help litigants receive and at an early stage before their legal problems snowball further. In addition, this is a collaborative effort by the judiciary, legal fraternity, the Ministry of Law and MCYS."*

11 The other signatories of the MOU added:

*"The establishment of the CJC will expand the range of help available to disadvantaged Singaporeans. The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports is glad to be part of this initiative. Those who approach the CJC for help may also require assistance in other areas, and it is important that they know how to access such services. Besides receiving assistance on legal matters, the CJC will also assist in referring litigants to relevant programmes and services run by Government agencies or voluntary welfare organizations, should they need them."*

- Ms Ong Toon Hui, Deputy Secretary,  
Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports

*"The Ministry of Law (MinLaw) applauds the CJC initiative by the Subordinate Courts. We are pleased to note that the initiative has been developed with the support and contributions of the community. MinLaw will provide the relevant and appropriate training on the operations and services of the Legal Aid Bureau in support of CJC's services and programmes."*

- Ministry of Law

*“An important part of the mission of the Law Society of Singapore is to serve the community by facilitating access to justice. The Law Society actively promotes pro bono work to address the legal needs of those who cannot afford legal services. Over the years, it has initiated and implemented various pro bono schemes to offer legal assistance to the needy. The Law Society through its volunteer lawyers and the Pro Bono Services Office is pleased to be an integral partner in the establishment, administration and support of the Community Justice Centre.”*

- Mr Lim Tanguy, Director,

Law Society’s Pro Bono Services Office

12 Mr Ang Check Hock, SC, of M/s Allen & Gledhill LLP shared, *“As a firm that is committed to pro bono work, Allen & Gledhill is happy to be involved in this important community project.”*

Dated : 20 June 2012

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Annex A: Types of Services and Programmes Provided By or Through the Community Justice Centre

Annex A

**Types of Services and Programmes Provided By or Through the Community Justice Centre (CJC)**

1. The CJC will provide the following to Litigants-in-Persons (LIPs) in need and who satisfy pre-determined criteria:

**(a) Legal clinics**

The CJC will refer LIPs to free legal clinics through agencies offering free legal advice, e.g. the Pro Bono Services Office of The Law Society of Singapore (LawSoc), in accordance with criteria set by these agencies. The parameters for people who are to receive help from the free legal clinics will continue to be based on the current arrangement with LawSoc and the predetermined criteria currently in use and set by LawSoc.

**(b) Lay assistance scheme**

Volunteers of the CJC will attend Court with indigent LIPs in need to provide them with essential practical help and emotional support. Under this scheme, volunteers do not give legal advice, but invest their time, skills and energy to render assistance in respect of the problems that LIPs may face. This includes giving moral support in Court, referral to a specialist agency or practical advice about a case.

2. The following services and programmes will be extended to all LIPs:

**(a) Information services**

The CJC will provide:

- information on court jurisdiction and structure, processes, procedures, proceedings, court and other legal forms, etc.;
- information on court etiquette (dos and don'ts), including the roles and functions of parties in court proceedings; and

- access to informational resources, e.g. videos, handbooks, brochures, templates, links to websites, etc., on court jurisdiction and structure, processes, procedures and proceedings.

**(b) Practical support services**

LIPs will be provided assistance with preparation of court forms, completion of standard legal applications and forms, e.g. probate applications, Magistrate's Complaint forms, maintenance applications, etc. They will also be given practical assistance to prepare for their court matters and applications. In addition, the CJC will develop self-help tools, guides and materials to assist LIPs to prepare for court matters and applications.

**(c) Referral services**

The CJC will refer LIPs to relevant community programmes and services run by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, Ministry of Law, Subordinate Courts, LawSoc, as well as any other relevant government and non-government agencies, e.g. voluntary welfare organisations.

3. In addition to the above services, the CJC will develop and implement public outreach and education programmes, as well as appropriate community services and programmes, to address the needs of LIPs and reach out to the wider group of potential court users.