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NEWS

“YWCA’s work aligns with and extends our national efforts to empower women”: Minister Edwin Tong at YWCA’s 150th Anniversary

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YWCA celebrates 150 great years of making a difference to women and the community in Singapore. All photos courtesy of YWCA.

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ophia Cooke was a governess in London when she heard a sermon about the Church Missionary Society and applied to be a candidate of the Society. She was accepted as an agent of the Society of Promoting Female Education in the East, and her assignment was to go to Singapore to head the Chinese Girls School.

The Anglican missionary arrived on Singapore's shore in 1853 and spent the next 42 years building up CGS. In 1865, the first Chinese Girls' School was formed – today known as St Margaret's School. Many of her CGS students became Christians.

In 1875, Sophia founded the Singapore branch of YWCA, the first women's organisation and a trailblazer in serving the needs of women. The organisation started out with monthly meetings she held for women, mostly her former students. They would conduct Bible reading, reach out to the needy and visit the sick in hospital to encourage them, reading Scripture and singing hymns to them.



Minister Edwin Tong SC and Mrs Tong, together with YWCA Board EXCO Members and Executive Director, raised a toast to celebrate YWCA's 150th Anniversary.

From that humble beginning, YWCA has pioneered initiatives for women, including setting up Singapore's first lending library, women-only hostels and night classes for women. And the organisation has continued to evolve over the decades to adapt to shifting needs, not just those of women, but the larger community as well.

On August 29, YWCA celebrated its 150th anniversary at Conrad Singapore Orchard, with guest-of-honour Minister of Law and Second Minister for Home Affairs, Mr Edwin Tong SC, and his wife.

It was a heartwarming evening, emceed by Eunice Olsen, a renowned women's advocate and former Nominated Member of Parliament. The gathering was treated to special performances by Corrinne May and international child violin prodigy Travis Wong. [Support the Ministry of Salt & Light](#) [Donate](#)



Singer Corrinne May performed a series of her best-known songs as well as a previously unreleased track, "The Promise Of You".



Child violin prodigy Travis Wong charmed the crowd with his passionate performance.

But it was the Hopemaker Runway that won the hearts of many. A meaningful collaboration between YWCA and local fashion brand [ANS.EIN](#) who turned artworks by Singapore artist Pauline Lau and YWCA's very own Hopemaker, Lily, to bring their stories to life on the runway.



Same mission, different needs

In her address, President of YWCA Singapore, Sim Hwee Hoon quote [Isaiah 43:19](#), “Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”

She said: “Tonight, we thank God for all He has done through the YWCA over the past 150 years. And we look ahead with joy and excitement for all the new things He will do through us.”

Looking beyond what has already been accomplished in the last 150 years, YWCA wants to broaden the traditional definition of women in need in order to address gaps and needs that may have gone unmet, she said.



Sim Hwee Hoon, President of YWCA said that YWCA’s mission will continue to be fulfilled in evolving ways to meet changing needs.

“While the heart of our mission will never change, the way we live it out must. Because needs look different today. In Sophia’s time, a ‘woman in need’ may have sought literacy or shelter. Today, she may be navigating single parenthood, caregiving, rebuilding after job loss, or trying to keep her business afloat. Tomorrow, she may face challenges we cannot yet imagine.”

In July this year, the organisation launched its Hopemaker Movement, which seeks to recognise every woman – whether she is a full-time caregiver, a working professional, or juggling both – affirming her as a “creator of hope.”

A key pillar of the Hopemaker Movement is the Hopemaker: Women's Business Accelerator (HWBA) programme which directly addresses the evolving needs of women from challenging backgrounds, such as those from the lower-income groups, caregivers of children with special needs or transnational women. The programme supports Hopemakers with training, mentorship and resources to turn their micro-businesses into sustainable and scalable ones. It is already seeing impact among its first intake of 22 participants.



Hopemaker Lily and her family modelled outfits featuring Lily's very own artwork "Fields of Flowers".



Mrs Singapore pageant queens modelled alongside YWCA Hopemakers in solidarity.

Marking this new season, YWCA also unveiled its new logo: A dark blue triangle (signifying the trinity of body, mind and spirit, representative of every woman's wholeness), flanked by two converging triangles of light blue and pink. Altogether the three triangles form a "W" – for women.

She added: "Our YWCA triangle – representing body, mind, and spirit – speaks of wholeness. This is our hope for every woman and their family we serve: strength for the body, wisdom for the mind, and light for the spirit. We believe a woman's life must be made whole – for she is the heart of her household."



Emcee Eunice Olsen hosting an auction during the dinner.

The evening also saw a call to support the organisation in its vision to transform its historic headquarters at Outram Road into a new Hope Hub, a dynamic space that will bring together women-focused organisations, social enterprises and partners.

“A legacy not just to celebrate, but to carry forward”

Minister Edwin Tong, in his speech, paid tribute to the work of YWCA in Singapore over the last 150 years, evolving with the times to impact and meet society's needs.

“In the 1970s, recognising the challenges faced by working mothers, YWCA established some of Singapore's earliest childcare centres, providing affordable and reliable care for thousands of children.



A father of three girls himself, Minister Edwin Tong said: “When women do well, families are stronger, workplaces are more inclusive, and overall, Singapore moves forward – together.”

“Although these childcare centres have since transitioned to other operators, this pioneering effort helped to lay the foundation for today’s family-friendly policies,” he noted.

YWCA also readily responded to the ageing population with its Meals-on-Wheels programme, “delivering not just nutritious meals, but much-needed companionship to homebound seniors,” said the Minister.

He also lauded the organisation’s digital literacy programmes for women, and its participation in the Y+ Collaboration with YMCA and SG Enable, offering therapeutic programmes and livelihood opportunities for persons with disabilities, and their caregivers.

Across every era of modern Singapore, YWCA Singapore has not only adapted to societal changes, but also ensured that its services remain relevant and create impact and transformation.



Some of the beautiful guests from YWCA overseas at the 150th anniversary dinner.

“What’s especially powerful, in my view, is how YWCA’s work aligns with and extends our national efforts to empower women and overall strengthen communities,” said Minister Tong.

“Since our independence, Singapore has taken steps to ensure that women have equal opportunities to thrive, to contribute, and to lead. Because when women do well, families are stronger, workplaces are more inclusive, and overall, Singapore moves forward – together.”



Minister Tong and Mrs Tong together with YWCA Hopemakers at YWCA's 150th Anniversary Commemorative Dinner.

Entrenched mindsets in society hold women back from fuller participation, especially in leadership roles, he added. “This is an area that YWCA has worked tirelessly on for over the past 150 years, and it remains central to our shared mission to change mindsets, to shape norms.”

He added: “As a father of three daughters myself ... I want (my daughters) to inherit a Singapore where no girl is ever made to feel that her dreams are too big. We must allow them to dream and to realise their aspirations because we are strong enough, caring enough as a society, to take collective responsibility to make this happen.”

The Minister said: “(YWCA has a) legacy that is so rich and enduring, one that has touched generations and continues to inspire us today. And I believe that this is a legacy not just to celebrate, but to carry forward.”

About YWCA of Singapore

Since 1875, the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) of Singapore has empowered women and families of all races and religions through practical support that addresses both financial pressures and socioemotional wellbeing, along with a strong community to grow and thrive in.

Guided by its core principles of Serving with Love, Embracing Change, Strengthening Communities, and Empowering Lives, YWCA focuses on enabling women from different backgrounds to better manage caregiving responsibilities, strengthen family stability, and access

YWCA operates a hospitality-based social enterprise through YWCA Fort Canning. All net profits from the hotel are channelled towards YWCA's community services and programmes, furthering YWCA's social mission, alongside the support of donors and partners.

To learn more or get involved, visit www.ywca.org.sg.

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