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ART EXHIBITION SHOWCASING 50 ARTISTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES' PERSONAL DEPICTION OF SINGAPORE LAUNCHED

SINGAPORE, 29 APRIL 2015 – TOUCH Community Services' Centre for Independent Living today launched an art exhibition entitled ***50 Special People: 1 Art Celebration*** which showcases 50 intellectually disabled artists' personal expression of Singapore. The artists are trainees in the centre's SpecialCrafts programme.

Held in celebration of Singapore's 50th birthday, this exhibition reveals the unique abilities of people with special needs and their tenacious spirit in overcoming learning difficulties. Combining themes of Singapore's culture with its distinctive landmarks and unique multi-racial diversity, each art work is an expression of the artists' personal thoughts and feelings about Singapore.

Executive Director of TOUCH Community Services Mr Eugene Seow, said, "Today, we celebrate the achievements of our trainees, many of whom have come a long way through sheer grit and determination. People with special needs often face challenges expressing themselves. This is why our SpecialCrafts programme has been geared towards helping our trainees communicate their personal thoughts and emotions. We are grateful that our trainees have this opportunity to share what Singapore means to them in their own unique ways."

50 Special People: 1 Art Celebration was officially opened this evening by Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Social and Family Development and Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, and Mayor of South West District, Ms Low Yen Ling. The exhibition will be open to public from 30 April 2015 to 10 May 2015 at That Spare Room @ The Fabulous Baker Boy café. The gallery's operating hours are from Tuesday to Thursday (11am – 10pm), Friday to Saturday (11am – 11pm) and Sunday (10am – 5pm). Admission is free.

Besides viewing the collection of artefacts inspired by distinctive Singapore features, consisting ceramic works and watercolour and acrylic paintings, visitors to the exhibition can pen their personal illustrations of Singapore onto art sheets. Trainees from the TOUCH SpecialCrafts programme will also be on hand to provide live demonstrations of their artistic abilities at selected timings.

A key highlight of the exhibition is a ceramic installation of 50 ethnic face plates forming the shape of the Singapore island. These ceramic plates are handcrafted individually by 50 trainees with each requiring approximately four hours to complete. An image of the ceramic installation can be viewed in Annex 1.

To commemorate the launch of this exhibition, 1,000 copies of a beautifully crafted book capturing personal quotes as well as images of the art works created by the 50 special artists will be given out to visitors at the exhibition. The quotes were compiled by coaches from TOUCH SpecialCrafts through casual conversations with their trainees over the past three months.

25-year-old trainee Mark Tam, who is diagnosed with mild intellectual disability, said “I feel so happy and excited that many Singaporeans will be coming to this exhibition. It is my first time participating in such an event. My parents are happy too that I can participate in this exhibition.”

50 Special People: 1 Art Celebration encapsulates the efforts of special needs individuals in celebrating Singapore’s Jubilee – an important milestone in history that marks the progress of Singapore, as well as her inclusiveness as a society, where every person is appreciated and respected in the community regardless of their abilities. The art exhibition is supported by the SG50 Celebration Fund.

“This year, Singapore celebrates 50 years of independence. We have come a long way as a nation and there is indeed much for us to rejoice and celebrate. But we must not allow Singapore’s progress and success to leave behind the needy and vulnerable. We can play an important part by supporting special needs causes and we can certainly change society’s perception of people with special needs by embracing them as part of society,” added Mr Seow.

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TOUCH Community Services' Special Needs Services Cluster

TOUCH's journey in meeting the needs of the special needs community began in 1990 when it saw the great need to help adults with intellectual disabilities get out of their homes, and to provide respite for their caregivers. That year, TOUCH Training Centre for the Disabled was started to train and empower trainees to become independent. In 1993, the centre was renamed TOUCH Community Industries as its programme expanded to include sheltered workshop for its clients. At the same time, TOUCH Silent Club was started to reach out to the hearing impaired. The following year, TOUCH was given an opportunity by the National Council of Social Service to manage its residential programme for the intellectually disabled. In 2003, TOUCH Community Industries was renamed TOUCH Centre for Independent Living to better reflect the centre's role in providing competency-based training for adults with mild intellectual disabilities, to help them live independently in the community. Today, TOUCH's work has grown to support some 500 special needs clients and 1,600 service users annually, including caregivers and families of clients. TOUCH Community Services' Special Needs Services Cluster includes TOUCH Centre for Independent Living, TOUCH Ubi Hostel and TOUCH Silent Club.

About TOUCH SpecialCrafts

TOUCH SpecialCrafts is an arts programme that gives trainees an avenue to harness and showcase their creative potential. Through TOUCH Centre for Independent Living's (TCIL) weekly Visual Arts Training Programme, they are taught to express themselves through art, and to develop their own distinctive styles, across various mediums, such as print-making, painting and ceramic works. Those who display artistic promise may choose to further hone their skills under TCIL's Artist Training Programme, and find employment at sheltered workshops. This provides a means for them to support themselves. The trainees' artworks are recognised through direct sales, auctions and charity fairs.

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