

# JUDICIARY TIMES



ENSURING THE  
CONTINUOUS  
DELIVERY OF JUSTICE

FAMILY JUSTICE  
COURTS  
WORKPLAN 2020

MASS CALL 2020:  
LIVING UP TO THE  
CALL IN A TIME  
OF PANDEMIC

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# ENSURING THE CONTINUOUS DELIVERY OF JUSTICE

While COVID-19 has transformed the way we live, work and interact, it has also presented new opportunities and inspired innovations in the Singapore Courts so that they can continue to serve the public efficiently and effectively amidst the disruptions caused by the pandemic.



### Leveraging Remote Communication Technologies

Technology, which has been a pivotal driver in enabling access to justice, now plays an even more central role as part of the solution for ensuring the continuous delivery of justice.

During the "Circuit Breaker" period from 7 April to 1 June when only essential and urgent matters were heard, the Singapore Courts leveraged the capabilities of technology by conducting their hearings through video conferencing technology. Meeting the judge, being assisted by an interpreter, and settling disputes without stepping into the courthouse may be a new experience for prosecutors, lawyers and parties but this has not impaired their access to fair justice. There was general consensus that the remote hearings were convenient, cost and time-efficient. After the "Circuit Breaker" ended, hearings continued to be conducted remotely for most matters.



As not all litigants-in-person (LIPs) have access to or are savvy users of video conferencing technologies, the Courts have set up video conferencing facilities in their premises for these LIPs to use. To minimise physical interactions, the State Courts and the Supreme Court have also set up a terminal at their information counter to assist court users who have enquiries. When a court user activates the video-assistance feature on the terminal, he will be connected to a service staff who will attend to him remotely.

### Providing a Safe Environment

The health and safety protocols that are in place fortify the Courts' efforts in maintaining the delivery of justice. Apart from keeping up their enhanced cleaning regime for courtrooms and all common areas, safe management measures such as temperature screening at the entrance, and spaced-out seating arrangements in courtrooms and common areas continue to be in place. Each of the three Courts has also published a microsite dedicated to announcements and updates on all COVID-19 related information from the Courts to keep court users up to date on the latest safety protocols in place.

As Singapore enters a phased approach to resuming activities safely, the Judiciary looks ahead and continues to do its part to restore and provide relief to a society in recovery.

*"Our experience during the pandemic has yielded many valuable lessons that we must now build on to improve our justice system and further enhance access to justice for all who require it."*

Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon



## FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS WORKPLAN 2020: TODAY IS A NEW DAY

The Family Justice Courts (FJC)'s sixth annual Workplan event themed "Today is a New Day" was held on 21 May. The Workplan marked a first for the Judiciary with FJC staff and guests attending the event virtually on Zoom amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Workplan was graced by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon as the Guest-of-Honour and the attendees included members of the Supreme Court Bench, and guests from the Judiciary and the family justice system. Before starting the Workplan proper, attendees were treated to a Workplan video depicting the significant milestones FJC had crossed since its formation in 2014.

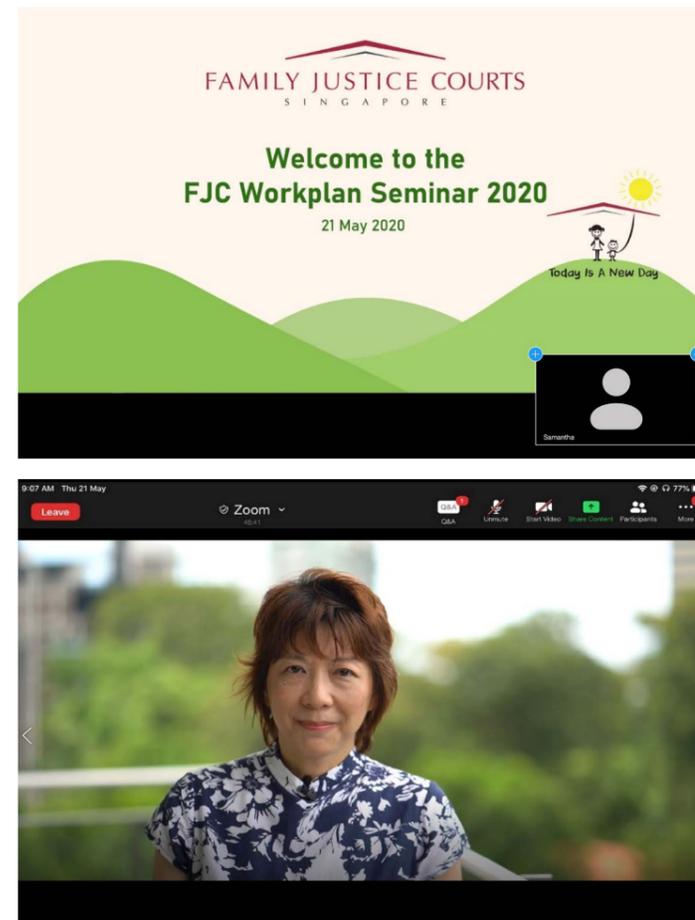
Delivering her Workplan Address to more than 400 attendees in the Opening Segment, Presiding Judge of the FJC, Justice Debbie Ong set out FJC's priorities and plans for the year 2020, with the key focus on "a new mindset, a new understanding of what it might take for families to find the way forward". Justice Ong shared that the family justice system should be non-adversarial with the focus on finding sustainable solutions for families and children in distress through the application of Therapeutic Justice (TJ). This is because in family proceedings, which often involve children, the distress caused by such litigation should be kept to the minimum.

Justice Ong emphasised the centrality of stakeholders, both upstream and downstream, including the "hugely important role" played by family lawyers, in supporting parties to take sensible steps and make rational decisions in family proceedings. The TJ lens, essentially a problem-solving one, will seek to address the family's inter-related legal and non-legal issues to reach an outcome.

In the second part of her address, Justice Ong shared that the FJC Workplan 2020 will focus on three workstreams:

- Furthering Therapeutic Justice within a Multi-disciplinary Approach.
- Facilitating Court Processes, Settlement, and Enforcement.
- Fortifying the Judges' and Lawyers' Capacity and Capability.

Finally, Justice Ong paid tribute to the dedication, commitment, and fortitude displayed by all FJC staff, the Family Bar, and partners in the family



justice system. She also expressed gratitude for the Chief Justice's leadership, whose vision and heartbeat for family justice is always most palpable.

After the main event, FJC staff participated in a dialogue session with the Chief Justice and Justice Ong. Chief Justice shared that family justice should focus on problem-solving, by identifying the cause of the breakdown of the family relationship and trying to find solutions for that. He shared that the whole objective of family justice is not to secure 'wins' for parties, but really to provide support so that the court users can navigate the system with as much assurance and as little fear as possible.

FJC staff took this rare opportunity to engage the Chief Justice on his views pertaining to family justice, technology adoption, and effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on judiciary operations, amongst others.

This year's Workplan event concluded with a special pre-recorded video performance put together by both court administrators and judges to encourage everyone amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.



## MASS CALL 2020: LIVING UP TO THE CALL IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC

The Admission of Advocates and Solicitors - Mass Call 2020, which took place on 25 and 26 August, was the first mass call in Singapore to be conducted using remote communication technology. A total of 528 newly appointed Advocates and Solicitors were called to the Bar over four video-conferencing sessions. The first session was presided over by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon; and the subsequent sessions by Judges of Appeal, Justice Andrew Phang, Justice Judith Prakash and Justice Steven Chong.

In the Chief Justice's speech titled "Living Up to the Call in a Time of Pandemic", a few key learning points were highlighted. The Chief Justice pointed out that "the pandemic has underscored the immense contribution that technology can make to the administration of justice" and that remote hearings have proven to be "feasible, convenient and effective". The Chief Justice also said that new litigation lawyers will have to learn to adapt to new forms of advocacy such as arguing their cases remotely.

The Chief Justice encouraged new lawyers to "actively consider how technology can improve efficiency in the delivery of legal services". Due to the economic

downturn caused by the pandemic, the Chief Justice said that "Clients may be cash-strapped" and advised that "Lawyers able to devise innovative solutions to improve efficiency and reduce costs, whether through technology or other means, will be better able to offer competitive services". The Chief Justice also mentioned that the pandemic would likely have unequal effects on Singapore's society and that new lawyers are encouraged to commit to pro bono legal work as it is now more critical than ever.

Mr Gregory Vijayendran, S.C., the President of the Law Society of Singapore, in his opening speech similarly urged the young lawyers to reach for the stars and not to let the current circumstances keep them in despair.



Scan the QR code for the Chief Justice's full speech

<https://go.gov.sg/masscall2020speech>

## VIDEO CONFERENCING IN THE COURTS

Given the urgent need to prevent and reduce the transmission of COVID-19, the Judiciary implemented remote hearings and moved towards determining a larger proportion of court matters asynchronously to minimise physical attendance in court by leveraging web-based video conferencing platforms in March this year. As far as possible, video-link was used in proceedings when doing so would serve the interests of justice, and where sufficient technical and administrative arrangements could be made at the place where any accused or witness will be giving evidence or appearing in court.

To ensure the smooth running of hearings by video-link, the courts implemented the necessary operational and security procedures, bearing in mind the requirements under the written law, including the temporary measures for court proceedings set out in the COVID-19 (Temporary) Measures Act.

These early plans reaped dividends when the Government announced the "Circuit Breaker" measures on 3 April, as the Judiciary was able to continue urgent and essential operations. In that same month, the Court of Appeal delivered a judgment using remote technology, without requiring the physical attendance of any judge, lawyer or litigant. In the State Courts, counsel and prosecutors continued the conduct of urgent and essential case mentions, pre-trial conferences and plead guilty mentions, all through remote communications. The first ever trial by video conference was conducted in the first week of May, over two days. With the consent of the accused who testified by video-link, all the witnesses gave evidence remotely.

The ability to use video conferencing in appropriate cases has allowed the courts to proceed with the administration of justice during these trying times, thus preventing the unnecessary adjournment of cases. For instance, in the State Courts, it was possible to record

evidence from a doctor who worked in the front line of infectious diseases treatment, and whose physical presence was not required by the court. In the FJC, trials for urgent matters concerning maintenance and hearings in the Youth Court continued.



Apart from court hearings, video conferencing has been used for other administrative purposes in the Courts. Through Zoom, the Supreme Court admitted 115 newly appointed Advocates and Solicitors to the Singapore Bar on 13 May over six sessions, and 528 applicants on 25 and 26 August over four sessions.

Remote technology has been a most valuable tool in empowering the continued administration of justice in this time of crisis. Its sustained use will continue where appropriate.



## NEW PROCESSES TO STREAMLINE PROCEEDINGS AND REDUCE PHYSICAL ATTENDANCE IN COURT

The State Courts have piloted new processes, such as asynchronous court hearings, where parties would participate in the proceedings from different locations and at different times, to reduce physical interaction in court and the time spent in the courthouse.

These processes also streamline the management of different types of cases and allow hearings in the State Courts to be conducted safely amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.



▶ **Asynchronous Court Dispute Resolution (aCDR)**

<https://go.gov.sg/scrc2>



▶ **Dispensation of Attendance and Asynchronous Hearing of Specified Hearings for Applications Filed under the Protection from Harassment Act**

<https://go.gov.sg/scrc12>



▶ **Dispensation of Attendance and Asynchronous Hearing of Specified Categories of Civil Hearings**

<https://go.gov.sg/scrc11>



▶ **Asynchronous Hearing and Processing of Pre-assessment of Damages Alternative Dispute Resolution Conferences**

<https://go.gov.sg/scrc13>



## FAMILY JUSTICE PRACTICE FORUM 2020: TJ - A RENEWED VISION

*"We focused on the adoption of TJ in our problem-solving system because we think this can make things better, we want to consider how each of our roles can be refreshed in this system... I am deeply convinced that if we work together in this endeavour we will make big difference to families."*

Justice Ong

The Family Justice Practice Forum 2020, organised by the Family Justice Courts (FJC) and supported by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and the Law Society of Singapore, was held on 27 July and was conducted via webinar in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The forum focused on Therapeutic Justice (TJ) as a common lens through which the family justice community can use to look at various aspects in the family justice system. For example, how the legal landscape of substantive rules, laws and legal procedures (i.e. hardware), as well as the role and behaviour of professionals including judges and lawyers (i.e. software), can produce helpful or harmful consequences to families and children in distress.

The forum was opened by Presiding Judge of the FJC, Justice Debbie Ong before three substantive presentations

on TJ were delivered. The first was FJC's presentation on the concept of TJ and the various upcoming TJ-related projects from the courts. MSF then presented its key initiatives in respect to the various stages of the divorce process, as well as trauma-related issues. The third presentation featured candid and thought-provoking interviews from junior and senior family lawyers on the application of TJ in their practice.

This year's forum also included a unique consultation segment that invited participants to provide their feedback and reflection on how they can co-create the future family justice landscape with TJ at the heart of it.

A total of 332 of participants comprising family practitioners, social science professionals, policy makers, academics, social services practitioners and others across the family justice system attended the forum.



## FIRST VIRTUAL SWEARING-IN CEREMONY

Judicial Commissioner Andre Maniam was appointed on 4 May. Due to the “Circuit Breaker” from 7 April to 1 June 2020, his swearing-in ceremony as a Judicial Commissioner of the Supreme Court of Singapore had to be postponed. With the uncertainty of the COVID-19 situation, President’s Office decided then to conduct the swearing-in virtually before the President of the Republic of Singapore on 3 June. This marks a historic moment where Judicial Commissioner Andre Maniam became the first judicial appointment holder in Singapore to be sworn-in via video conferencing.



## VIRTUAL MEETING BETWEEN THE CHIEF JUSTICES OF VIETNAM AND SINGAPORE

The Chief Justices of the Supreme Court of Singapore and the Supreme People’s Court (SPC) of Vietnam held a virtual meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> June to discuss judicial developments in ASEAN. At the meeting, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon and Chief Justice Nguyen Hoa Binh reaffirmed the strong bilateral relationship between Singapore and Vietnam, and commended the positive efforts undertaken by the two judiciaries in handling the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on court operations. The Supreme Court of Singapore, supporting as the Secretariat for the Council of ASEAN Chief Justices (CACJ), will continue to assist SPC Vietnam in the organisation and planning of the 8<sup>th</sup> CACJ Meeting to be hosted by Vietnam this year. The exchange ended on a positive note, with the Chief Justices agreeing to continue working closely together.



## JUSTICE AEDIT ABDULLAH DELIVERS SPEECH AT THE 12<sup>TH</sup> LUJIAZUI FORUM



As a testament to the friendship and close links between the judiciaries of Singapore and China, Justice Aedit Abdullah was invited by the Shanghai High People’s Court to speak at the 12<sup>th</sup> Lujiazui Forum on 19 June.

The Lujiazui Forum is a high-level global platform for influential government officials, world financial leaders and outstanding scholars to discuss and foster international financial cooperation, further financial reform and open China’s markets. The theme this year was “Shanghai International Financial Center Initiative 2020: New Starting Point, New Mission, New Vision”.

In his speech that was delivered remotely and entitled “The Role of the Courts in Fostering Financial Reform and the Development of International Financial Centres”, Justice Abdullah highlighted that Shanghai and Singapore shared common objectives to be leading financial centres and shared key points that the Judiciary considered essential to the continued growth and development of Singapore’s financial centre.

# A HACKATHON FOR INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO ENHANCE ACCESS TO JUSTICE

## Enhancing Access to Justice in the Age of Disruption



HOW

Learn-as-you-hack



WHEN

Jul to Oct 2020



WHO

People who care about justice

The Singapore Judiciary and DBS Bank have jointly organised the inaugural 'Hackathon for a Better World' to encourage action-oriented dialogues and find innovative solutions to enhance access to justice in today's age of disruption.

From July to October, a total of 37 teams comprising practising lawyers, legal technologists, law students and staff from DBS Bank and the Singapore Judiciary will be challenged to "hack" the following problem statements:

- What role can the legal profession play to help everyone in the society have better access to justice?
- How can businesses and the legal system collaborate to provide easier access to justice and improve customer experiences?
- How can the justice system become more agile, responsive and flexible to meet the needs of a rapidly evolving society?

The 'slow-burn' Hackathon adopts a unique "learn-as-you-hack" format where participants work on the problem statements over a course of three months, allowing them ample time and space to develop bright ideas and transform them into reality, while comfortably managing their daily responsibilities.

In a joint press release issued by the Singapore Judiciary and DBS Bank on 20 July, Chief Transformation and Innovation Officer, Mr Tan Ken Hwee, said: "We are very happy to partner DBS in this hackathon. COVID-19 has shown that transformation is not just possible - it is essential if we are to meet the challenges brought about by this pandemic and other uncertainties. Learning from proven innovation frameworks used in leading private sector companies can enhance legal transformation and innovation, and enhance access to justice."



Scan the QR code to view the kick-off video  
<https://go.gov.sg/hfabwvideo>

# SGUNITED MEDIATION INITIATIVE TO HELP LITIGANTS

*"Mediation has been shown to be an affordable and effective means of resolving conflicts. At a time of unprecedented disruption brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is hoped that this initiative can help litigants to resolve their disputes amicably, and to move on with their lives and businesses as soon as possible."*

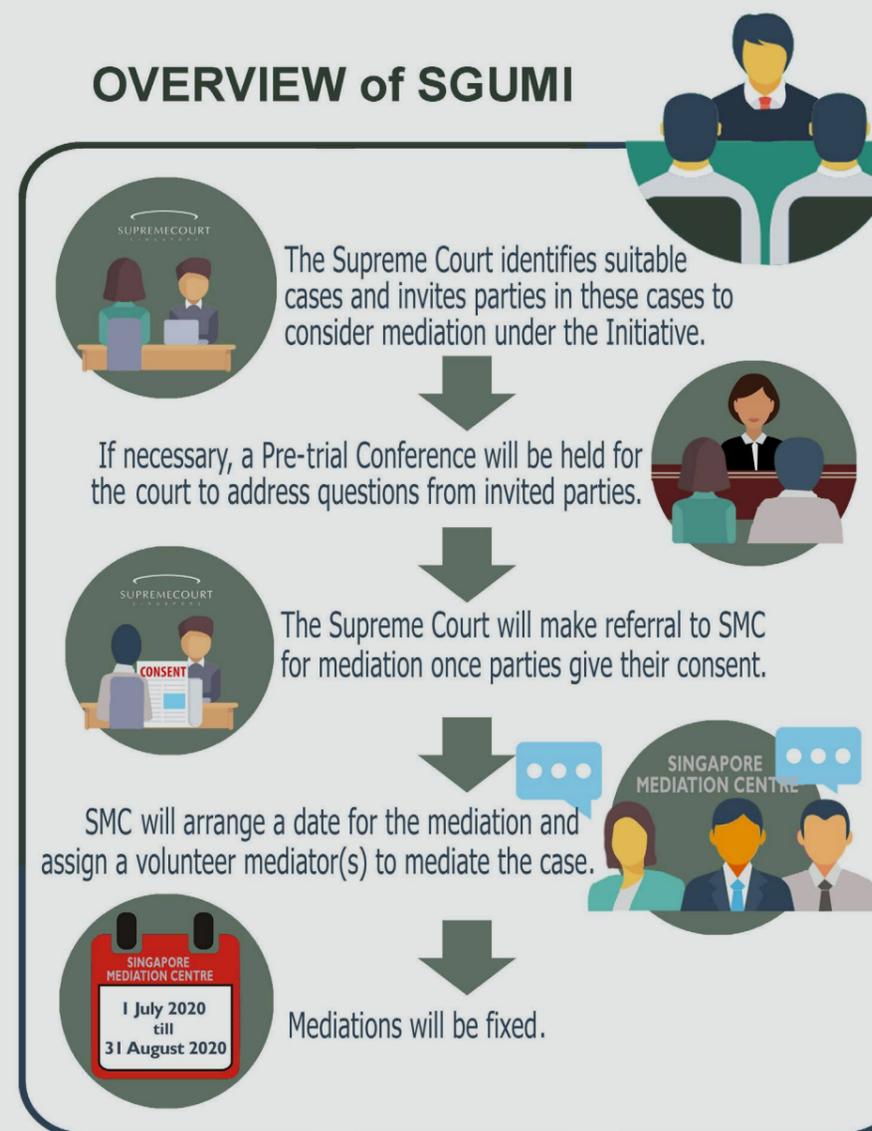
Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon

With the aim to help litigants move on quickly from the disruption and uncertain economic outlook brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Supreme Court, in collaboration with the Singapore Mediation Centre (SMC), launched the SGUnited Mediation Initiative (SGUMI) in July to refer suitable cases in the Supreme Court for mediation at SMC at no charge to parties.

Through this initiative, parties were given the additional avenue to resolve their disputes quickly and could also avoid protracted litigation. The SGUMI also allowed parties to save legal costs and minimised the emotional toll that often accompany litigation, when they reached an amicable settlement through mediation.

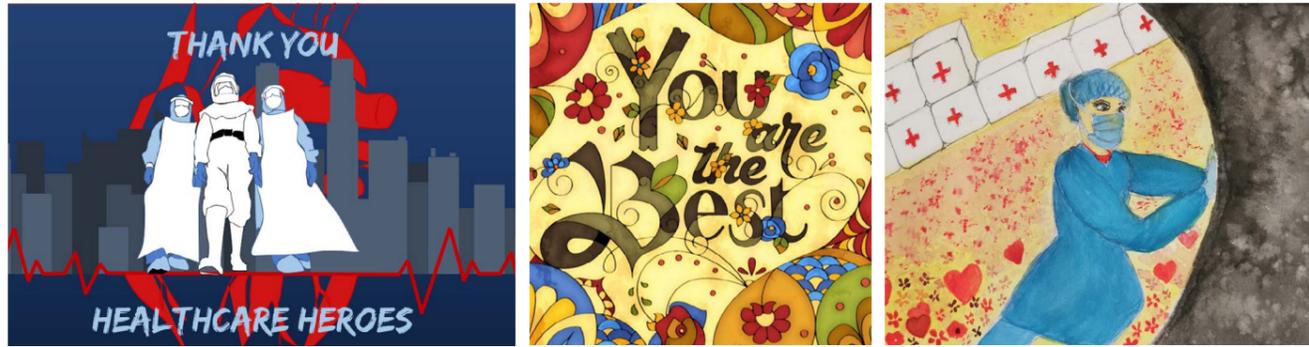
SMC Executive Director, Mr Ban Jiun Ean, said: "We are honoured to partner the Supreme Court to offer mediation at no cost to selected cases during this difficult time as businesses and individuals set about to rebuild livelihoods. We are also grateful to our mediators who have readily stepped forward to volunteer their time and lend their help and expertise to this initiative. Mediation offers a unique opportunity for parties locked in battle to take a step back, reassess their interests and find creative or practical solutions together to move forward."

## OVERVIEW of SGUMI



## SUPPORTING FRONT-LINE PERSONNEL THROUGH CSR

The State Courts continue to actively contribute to the community through their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. In the light of the COVID-19 situation, they reached out to front-line personnel and disadvantaged families.



In April, State Courts' judges and staff contributed their personal art pieces and well wishes for *SG Health Care Heroes - Energising through Art*, to spread positivity among the healthcare community and commemorate Singapore coming together in difficult times. As part of the State Courts' annual National Day fundraising efforts, they reached out to Beyond Social Services, a charity dedicated to helping children and youths from less privileged backgrounds, to provide 275 children with three reusable masks each, through the *Gift a mask, Help a Child* initiative. The masks were purchased from social enterprise Sew We Can, which supports women from less privileged families to utilise their sewing skills to earn extra income for their families.



Recognising the difficult situation that migrant workers face because of the pandemic, the State Courts raised \$17,850 for 119 workers who were involved in the construction of the State Courts Towers to show support and appreciation of their contributions to society. Through their employers, they each received a token sum of \$150 and an appreciation e-card from the State Courts.

*"We thank you for your kind and warm gesture"*

Migrant workers, Samsung C&T Corporation

*"On behalf of the workers, thank you for the token of appreciation"*

- Julin Construction Pte Ltd

From 13 to 20 September, the State Courts, Supreme Court and Family Justice Courts came together to participate in a virtual walkathon, organised by the Samaritans of Singapore, a non-profit organisation dedicated to providing emotional support to individuals facing a crisis, thinking about or are affected by suicide. The virtual walkathon brought the community together to show solidarity with people who are struggling to cope with the challenges of adapting to the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## VIRTUAL HEARINGS WITHOUT TEARS

The COVID-19 situation has accelerated the pace of adoption of remote-hearing technologies. In hopes to enhance the quality of online advocacy and maintain professionalism, here is a summary of an article on virtual hearing best practices put together by the Judiciary and the Singapore Academy of Law. These best practices are equally relevant to working from home as well.

### Physical and Tech Set-Up

- 1 Use a computer instead of a mobile phone. Your mobile phone can be a backup device. Because redundancy is good.
- 2 Consider using an external video camera so that you can have greater flexibility in positioning and possibly better quality video.
- 3 Consider using an external speaker and/or microphone if your built-in speaker and microphone do not seem to put you right in the hearing room.
- 4 Alternatively, a headset with headphone and microphone built in may work well for you, too.
- 5 Positioning your video camera at eye-level is best and try to keep it at a distance that makes the size of your face about two-thirds to four-fifths of the screen height.
- 6 Multiple monitors are great, and some lawyers think that a minimum of three are necessary.
- 7 A green screen will make virtual backgrounds much better, but you must be prepared for the physical space that a green screen will take up.
- 8 Consider getting video lights to get uniform and sufficient lighting on your face.
- 9 Try to get a wired connection for your broadband connection, all the way from where the fibre optic cable enters into your house, to your computer, instead of relying on WiFi.
- 10 If a WiFi connection is unavoidable, ask for a mesh network to be set up, preferably using the latest WiFi 6 standards.
- 11 You can also deploy a 4G mobile router that can provide a totally separate network as a "backup" for your fibre optic broadband service.



### Before the Hearing



- 12 Make sure you update your video conferencing software so that you are always using the latest version.
- 13 Check (and double-check) your camera, microphone and speakers.
- 14 Check in advance that you have the correct meeting entry credentials and can get in, so that you can seek assistance if necessary. Do not wait until just a few minutes before the hearing!

### During the Hearing

- 15 Try to minimise disruptions and interruptions and don't indulge in cross-talk or unnecessary interjections.
- 16 Consider muting yourself when you are not speaking so that you do not inadvertently transmit any unintended audio.
- 17 Make sure you are complying with the relevant dress-code requirements.



Scan the QR code for the full article  
<https://go.gov.sg/virtualhearingswithouttears>

# HR FEST AWARDS 2020: FINALIST FOR "BEST WORKPLACE CULTURE AND ENGAGEMENT (<500 EMPLOYEES)"



The Supreme Court has been shortlisted, from a pool of over 50 participants, as a finalist in the HR Fest Awards 2020 under the category of "Best Workplace Culture and Engagement (for organisations with fewer than 500 employees)". It is also the only public agency in the shortlist.

This award recognises the character and personality of an organisation - what makes it unique in terms of its values, traditions, beliefs and how the organisation leveraged these to create employee engagement. The Supreme Court Staff Engagement Team was formed in 2017 and has been collaborating with divisions/directorates to engage all staff so as to build a culture of (1) trust and respect, (2) open communication and sharing, (3) teamwork and partnership, (4) empowerment and ownership, and (5) learning and experimentation.

The other finalists for the same category included Circles.Life, NTUC LearningHub Pte Ltd, Royal Plaza on Scotts and Twitter Singapore.

The HR Fest Awards 2020 is open to all Asia-based employers from the private and public sectors including all multinational corporations, local companies, government agencies and small and medium-sized enterprises. It recognises and celebrates the outstanding achievements of Asia's top human resources leaders, companies and teams. It is a highlight of the annual HR Tech Festival Asia event organised by HRM Asia, which showcases speakers, thought leaders and visionaries sharing their perspectives on the convergence of human resources, technology and the new world of work.



# ONE JUDICIARY

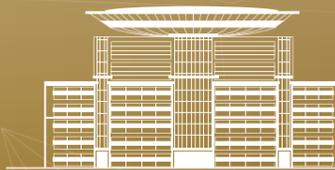
Annual Report 2019

## ONE JUDICIARY ANNUAL REPORT 2019

The One Judiciary Annual Report 2019 highlights the achievements of the Supreme Court, the State Courts and the Family Justice Courts. It has been a notable year as the Judiciary persevered in its efforts to build a fairer and more efficient justice system. The Singapore Judiciary will continue to leverage technology and innovation to enhance access to justice.



Scan to view the One Judiciary Annual Report 2019 or download a copy at: <https://go.gov.sg/2019ojar>



SUPREME COURT  
REIMAGINING THE FUTURE OF OUR COURTS



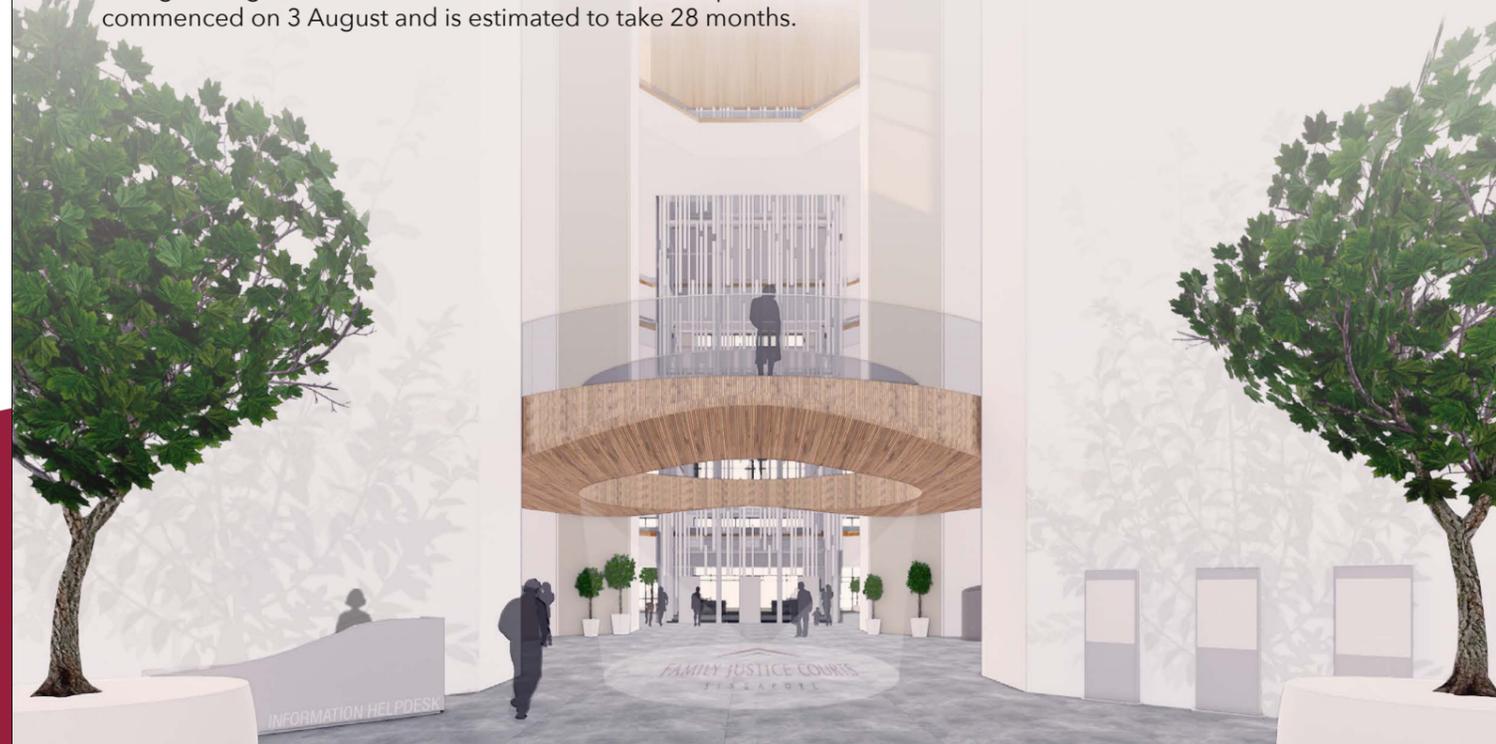
STATE COURTS  
A TRUSTED AND FORWARD-LOOKING JUDICIARY



FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS  
EVERY OUTCOME, A WAY FORWARD

## THE FUTURE HOME OF THE FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS

The octagonal building at Havelock Square will be the Family Justice Courts' future home. The additions and alterations (A&A) project has been awarded to Lum Chang Building Contractors Pte Ltd. The scope of the contract includes refurbishment works to the existing nine-storey octagonal building, which includes overall structural strengthening works, construction of new slabs, lifts replacement and facade conservation works. The construction commenced on 3 August and is estimated to take 28 months.



## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH OFFICERS FROM STRATEGIC PLANNING & POLICY



**Kevin Tang**  
Deputy Director, Strategic Planning & Policy, Supreme Court



**Denise Cheng**  
Assistant Director, Strategic Planning, State Courts



**Donny Tan**  
Senior Assistant Director, Strategic Planning, Family Justice Courts

Strategic planning may be understood as a systematic process to guide an organisation towards achieving its mission. In the Singapore Courts, officers in the Strategic Planning department identify and analyse the current trends in the judicial ecosystem and work closely with key stakeholders to formulate new ideas and implement new initiatives.

In this issue, we interviewed, Kevin Tang (**KT**), who joined the Supreme Court in 2015, Denise Cheng (**DC**), who joined the State Courts in 2014, and Donny Tan (**DT**) who joined the Family Justice Courts (FJC) in 2018. Read on to find out more about the work they do.

### Describe your job scope

**KT:** In a nutshell, my job is about analysing issues to understand the crux of the matter and coming up with possible solutions. My job scope broadly covers areas such as horizon scanning and benchmarking to identify emerging trends and areas of interest in the legal and judicial fields, coordination, planning and policy work involving other directorates, stakeholder engagement, secretariat work for supporting various committees, as well as drive court excellence and organisational development initiatives in the Supreme Court.

**DC:** I head the Planning Unit in State Courts' Strategic Planning & Technology Division. My job scope includes planning for the annual State Courts Corporate Retreat, where the organisation brainstorms new ideas and strategic directions for our Workplan. I also conduct horizon scanning, to identify international developments and trends in the legal sector and beyond that may present opportunities or challenges for the State Courts in future. In the current COVID-19 season, we are looking out for evolving trends and developments that would impact the Judiciary, and identifying the risks to be mitigated, in order for us to thrive in a post-COVID-19 world.

**DT:** I currently helm the Corporate Planning team of the Strategic Planning & Research Division. I am responsible for planning matters such as: (a) the seeding of ideas for workplan initiatives including the formulation of initiatives; (b) the tracking of workplan initiatives, including timelines

and achievements; (c) organising FJC's annual corporate events such as the workplan seminars and our ideation-centric corporate retreats; and (d) working closely with the Registry's roster team in maintaining the currency of FJC's corporate calendar to facilitate decision-making.

As part of my job scope, I also work on cross-divisional strategic initiatives and projects which aim to improve court users' experience and achieving FJC's strategic thrusts.

### What projects have you worked on?

**KT:** I am currently working on a project that looks at the effective implementation of the International Framework for Court Excellence (IFCE) for the Supreme Court. The IFCE seeks to help courts evaluate and improve their performance, as measured against seven areas of court excellence. The aim is to improve the quality of justice and court administration.

I was also involved in the development of the Judicial Heritage Gallery that was launched in January this year. The Gallery was a few years in the making and the SPPIRD team really put in a lot of hard work to ensure the successful delivery of this project at this year's Opening of the Legal Year event.

**DC:** I am the editor of our bi-monthly internal Horizon Window newsletter, which features commentaries and news articles on leading and emerging trends and developments that may impact the State Courts. We have recently highlighted the new trends on how COVID-19 is transforming other courts, as well as the legal sector, and the nature of work in the global economy. Apart from COVID-19 topics, we normally scan for developments and best practices adopted by other courts and industries, and draw lessons that could be adapted to the State Courts (e.g. in areas such as judicial work, court administration, organisational strategy, innovation, human resources and customer service). These would include advancements and developments in emerging and disruptive technology, and how they could be applied to the courts.

**DT:** I am most proud of organising the recent FJC Workplan Seminar. This was done amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, which posed many challenges that we managed to overcome. For the Judiciary, it was actually one of the first events of

such a scale to be hosted online and it was gratifying that the feedback we had received was positive and heart-warming.

One of the projects that I am currently working on is the Design Thinking project, which entails the re-imagining of the future court experience and the visioning of our future customer journey maps for family violence, vulnerable adults, and divorce. This project is close to my heart because court users often come to FJC at one of the most vulnerable points in their lives.

### Why are you passionate about your job?

**KT:** I have been given the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution and a positive difference to the organisation, individuals and their families, and even society.

**DC:** The nature of the job is outward looking, which makes it exciting, if you are someone who is curious and has a love of knowledge. There is never a dull moment as there are always new, thought-provoking developments to highlight, and the applications of technology never cease to amaze us. We have the opportunity to make a difference in our organisation, by ensuring that our strategic direction, organisational development and operations are in step with the sector and industry, so as to advance our vision to be a trusted and forward-looking Judiciary that delivers justice.

**DT:** The greatest satisfaction for us would be to be able to plan and initiate something that would have a direct, positive impact on our court users. That is something that keeps us going

### What are some valuable skills or lessons that you have learnt from the job?

**KT:** As part of the policy-setting process, we should always welcome rigorous debate and differing views (even the outliers) to ensure that we arrive at the best possible decision. I have learnt to be humble, a good listener, and flexible in approach and thinking without compromising values or principles.

**DC:** The importance of being open-minded to new ideas, possibilities, and finding ways to adapt them to make our current strategic plans or processes better. The skill of innovative thinking and collaboration, and how we innovate individually and as a team in ways that make our organisation more flexible and responsive to external developments and technological changes. I am referring to the Agile approach to organisational development, which encourages cross-functional teams to self-organise to solve problems and deliver value. Managers only step in when issues exceed specified tolerances (e.g. delay/cost overrun of more than x%), or are otherwise beyond the team's ability to resolve. Last but not least, the importance of continuous learning in our technology-dominated post-COVID-19 environment, where we need to constantly acquire new skills to meet the evolving nature of our jobs.

**DT:** Everyone right down to the last staff member plays a crucial role in the family justice system. Throughout the Design Thinking project, I have met colleagues from other departments and even from other organisations such as Ministry of Social and Family Development who are ever so passionate and ready to contribute good ideas and feedback to shape the future court user experience.

### What are the critical qualities that a policy/planning officer should have?

**KT:** Policy formulation and implementation is primarily about trade-offs of competing options. I think it is important for an officer to have a mindset of being open to diverse views, to be able to think through the pros and cons of each of the various options, as well as their unintended consequences, have a fine eye for details, and the conviction and commitment to implement policies effectively.

**DC:** A healthy sense of curiosity about the world around us, an interest in current affairs and/or developments (including technology), and how these could enhance our lives. These should be paired with critical thinking and analytical skills, to assess which best practices and/or technology could be adapted to the context of the State Courts and the Judiciary, to advance our organisational and whole-of-Judiciary objectives.

**DT:** I think a planning officer must have an inquisitive mind and stay ahead of trends. At the same time, he/she should balance with ground realities so that any planning is not made from an ivory tower. It is also fundamentally important to recognise that there is no monopoly of ideas in anyone. In addition, the planning officer should be able to string everything together in a coherent manner.

### Based on trend analysis or horizon scanning, what do you think will be the Court of the Future?

**KT:** No one can be exactly certain of what the future may hold. I think many are asking fundamental questions such as whether the courts would still be performing their current role in the same form. There is a greater use of technology in the administration of justice in many countries to overcome the challenges brought about by the pandemic. Given the increasing use of remote hearings in many countries, I think there may come a day where it may no longer be necessary to have a physical court building or courtroom dedicated to conducting hearings and trials.

**DC:** The Court of the Future will definitely be one where we see more online courts (via video conferencing) and asynchronous hearings (where parties do not meet together in one place, but join in from different locations and at different times).

We will also be moving towards providing more integrated and comprehensive self-help online services (e.g. web portals), so that court users can access most information, guidelines and updates online, as well as perform transactions and payments via our portals. These will minimise their visits to the courts. With emerging technology, we and/or our stakeholders will increasingly be able to provide court users with more services, e.g. helping them to understand and weigh their options and even prepare their arguments/evidence. However, we will need to ensure that there is sufficient assistance to the less tech-savvy court users, so that justice is accessible to all.

**DT:** Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon had sketched out some of these potential ideas and the larger Court of the Future blueprint in many of his speeches. If there is anything that the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us, it is the potential of remote hearings. I would suggest that, with the rate at which technology is changing, we should not be fixated with a certain idea of the future court system but be ever ready to adapt even better practices found in other industries.

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