

Strengthening Communities

With Low-income Families in Singapore

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Executive Summary

Strong communities rarely exist in neighborhoods of Singapore today, despite their potential to solve some pressing social urban problems. They are also important as a form of social support and resource network for low-income families. With Beyond Social Services (BSS) as our client, this Policy Analysis Exercise (PAE) investigates how communities with low-income families in Singapore can be strengthened.

We focus our study on the Bukit Ho Swee (BHS) neighborhood as it has a high concentration of low-income families, whom we identify based on their residency in BHS public rental flats. We conducted 46 personal interviews with BHS households, of which at least 27 are low-income. We also interviewed other community actors such as representatives from BSS, Family Service Centre and the Resident's Committee.

Interview results were analyzed from both a macro and micro perspective that focused on relationships between community stakeholders and interpersonal relationships at the individual level respectively. The macro analysis revealed that there were problems with community stakeholders collaborating with each other, problem with representativeness of community leaders and sources of funding that decided the bargaining power of stakeholders. The micro analysis on the other hand, revealed that there were lack of effective platforms needed to bridge segregated social networks, meaningful activities to bond residents as well as a lack of emotional support given to the low-income residents that is necessary for their integration into the community.

This report hence suggests 5 comprehensive solutions that complement each other to solve the above problems. An online crowdsourcing community portal and accessible well-designed public spaces help to create an ecosystem promoting community building from the ground up. Protocols to enhance collaboration between stakeholders is necessary as community building processes requires the involvement of all stakeholders for success. Methods to increase the effectiveness of community building events and self-help groups to provide psychological support for the low-income residents are also recommended. A vibrant community, however, is ultimately a process that needs time to develop and flourish. It is only with the buy-in from all stakeholders on its importance that there will be a greater source of optimism for stronger communities becoming a reality in Singapore in the future.

Abbreviation

1. **PAE:** Policy Analysis Exercise, a public policy study completed as a capstone module of the school's Master in Public Policy (MPP) program.
2. **BSS:** Beyond Social Services, a Voluntary Welfare Organization in Singapore that helps to raise disadvantaged children and youths.
3. **VWO:** Voluntary Welfare Organization
4. **PA:** The People's Association, established on 1 July 1960 as a statutory board to promote racial harmony and social cohesion in Singapore.
5. **RC:** Resident's Committee, established in 1978 by People's Association in Singapore with the aim of promoting neighborly interaction, good communal relations and overall cohesion.
6. **CC:** Community Clubs, common spaces established by People's Association in Singapore for people of all races to come together, build friendships and promote social bonding. CCs also connect residents and the Government by providing relevant information and gathering feedback on national concerns and policies.
7. **CCMC:** Community Club Management Committee
8. **BHS:** Bukit Ho Swee neighborhood in Singapore
9. **VCF:** VWO-Charities Capability Fund
10. **FSC:** Family Service Center
11. **GNP:** Good Neighbors Project Program
12. **MP:** Members of Parliament
13. **SSO:** Social Service Office

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1.0 Problem Definition

1.1 Background

Singapore neighborhoods rarely display strong community spirits and cohesiveness (Yeo, 2014; Kok, 2015). Findings state that the most frequent activity neighbors exchange with each other are limited to “exchange of greetings/small talk”. Exchanges that display trust, such as looking after house keys or lending and borrowing items, are rare in Housing Board estates (Yeo, 2014). The National Youth Survey 2013 report also revealed that only 8% of youth source close friends from the same neighborhood (Kok, 2015).

Perhaps this is an expected phenomenon. The rampant urbanization and economic development of Singapore, along with many parts of the world, is producing a social order in which the traditional ties of a community such as shared space, close kinship links, shared religious and moral values are being replaced by individualism and competition (Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Summers & Branch, 1984). Similarly, globalization has propelled a highly connected and mediated world where communities can also be formed anywhere — across cities, internationally and virtually. With various diverse possibilities of socialization, particularly for an advanced global city like Singapore, one might ask if there is indeed a pressing need to form communities with spatial proximity, in other words, in neighborhoods (Guest and Wierzbicki, 1999).

However, Singapore is in a unique position where people from multiple ethnic races (approximately 76.2% Chinese, 15.0% Malay, 7.4% Indian) reside in the same neighborhood (National Population and Talent Division, 2014). Given the diversity in Singapore’s population, a lack of interaction between different segments of society, either between racial groups or different income groups can cause a growing disconnection and lead to a perceived decline of shared values. This opens up space for suspicion, mistrust, and social fragmentation or reduced social cohesion (OECD, 2012; Forrest & Kearns, 2001).

To avoid such social unrest and to promote a cohesive society, Singapore’s neighborhoods have been, and continue to be, designed with a goal to integrate different segments of society based on race and income together¹. This is especially evident

¹ Examples include mixing low-income rental housing with owner occupied housing of different sizes and sitting HDB towns near or adjacent to private apartments and landed housing areas to avoid low-income ghettos. To date, there is still a substantial stock of over 200,000 rental and owner-occupied HDB apartments in the Central Region

through the ethnic quotas in housing development estates (Sin, 2002) and mixing low-income rental housing with owner occupied housing in urban planning (Wu, 2014). Spatial proximity provides a space where residents meet and interact with people from different walks of life, exchange values and manage expectations about each other (Turner, 1991). Hence, there is a case for stronger communities bounded by geography especially in the case of Singapore with such a diverse ethnic mix and high income inequality (Loh, 2016).

At the same time, strong communities prove to be particularly beneficial to low-income families, who are at higher risks of weak physical and emotional growth. While low-income families are usually beneficiaries of social welfare assistance, Jencks (1992) and Schiller (2001) argue that the numerous qualifying criteria found in these schemes could worsen individuals' self-reliance skills and undermine their sense of self-worth, as opposed to helping them alleviate poverty. Instead, it was noted that more sustainable positive outcomes were attained when social assistance were coupled with programs that encourage community participation, indigenous leadership and decision makings. (Jencks, 1992; Mancini & Marek, 2004; Schiller, 2001). Brisson and Usher (2005) and Bowen et al. (2000) also found that community ties can help low-income families better access resources when faced with contingencies.

In Singapore, while there are various forms of financial assistance schemes such as the ComCare Assistance Schemes (Saad, 2015), the form of social support from a community is lacking. One study on the low-income elderly in Singapore have found that having close family and friends is important as they are the ones who encourage them to go for health screenings and to seek better information on diseases (Ng, 2014). Thus, strengthening communities is important as a source of social support for the low-income residents in Singapore, as the strong communities help the low-income residents to feel that the society cares about them and allow them to gain access to information which they would have been incognizant of.

In light of the importance of communities from the perspective of low-income families as well as the community as a whole, this PAE project aims to answer the research question of how communities with low-income families in Singapore can be strengthened.

1.2 Problem in the Context of the Client

The client engaged in this research project is Beyond Social Services (BSS), a Singapore Voluntary Welfare Organization (VWO). Set up in 1969, it aims to increase Singapore's social mobility by targeting low-income youths-at-risk residing in rental housing from Ang Mo Kio, Henderson, Whampoa, Lengkok Bahru and Bukit Ho Swee. To achieve its aim, it tries to create a restorative problem-solving climate for the youths through organizing community building activities that can promote mutual support among neighbors and spur the entire community to take an interest in the lives of the youths.

Yet, BSS had not always adopted a full community building based approach in its activities. Prior to 2010, BSS relied on individualized interventions where social workers would interact with youth beneficiaries on a one-to-one basis. This trajectory changed when it started seeing collective social responsibility and community empowerment as more effective ways to solving youths-at-risk problems. A full community building approach was introduced as BSS's core strategy in 2013.

For instance, its flagship project, the Youth United Programme (YUP), aims to build a friendly environment for the youths by utilizing other non-youth community members. While the program aims to reform the at-risk youths, the tools and methods utilized depended heavily on building trust and getting the community involved in the rehabilitation process. Other initiatives that work towards growing competent, self-flourishing, and self-empowered communities include "Ang Mo Kio's I Build Community, Community Builds Me" and a series of community field trips to places such as the Singapore Zoo and Sentosa.

Furthermore, recognizing that active participation by all community members is important, it often encourages community members to take up volunteering roles in its programs, with the intention to gradually nudge them towards leadership and organizing positions. However, as most of the programs primarily targets youth, its community building efforts had not always been successful in involving other non-youth members of the community. In addition, as its community-based approach has only been introduced recently, BSS has not yet explored the full possibilities of this community-based approach and has not fully understood how they can effectively collaborate with the other stakeholders, who also have a stake in the community building process.

Hence, in terms of analyzing how communities with low-income families can be strengthened in Singapore, **our research aims to answer two specific sub-research questions of (i) what is the role of each stakeholder (VWOs such as Beyond Social Services, Resident’s Committee, Family Service Centre, and the community residents) in the community building process and (ii) how the low-income can be better supported to help them integrate into the larger community. In this project, our client has agreed that the report analysis and solutions do not need to cater to BSS as they are more interested in having a comprehensive overview of the problem based on the above research question.**

2.0 Communities: A General Concept

Existing literature suggests varying definitions of a strong community. Block (2008) defines it as a place comprising “the sense of belongings, trust of others and safety” while Pharr (2010) regards it as a place where “people in any configuration bond together over time through common interest and concern, through responsibility and accountability to one another, and at its best, through commitment, friendship and love”. Seen as a place that is constantly changing, Bettez (2011) describe a community as “both a process and a goal” that comprises “continually shifting groups of people that dialogue with, actively listen to, and support each other”.

Organizations like the People’s Association (PA) takes a slightly different view - it sees community as a place where people “keep their distinct identities and cultural values while moving and interacting with one another in the common space” and a place where people share values, pursue passions, fulfill their hopes and create treasured memories together. (People’s Association, 2017). Our client BSS defines community as a ‘village’ with the capacity to raise disadvantaged youths for them to “blossom into responsible adults” and “move past their socio-economic drawbacks” (Beyond Social Services, 2016).

For the purposes of this project, we define a strong community as a place (i) **bounded by a geographical area (neighborhoods)**, (ii) **comprising people tied by a sense of belonging and ownership to the area**, all whom (iii) **appreciate and respect each other’s distinct identities**.

Building a strong community requires continuous and collective effort (Warren, Thompson & Saegerst, 2001). Jason (1997) argues that community building is a “disorderly, rebellious and messy” process while other literatures describe it as a participatory process that responds to local challenges through organizing and strengthening social connections and common values (Ledwith, 2011; Philips & Pittman, 2009; Kazhoyan, 2012).

Yet, additional factors may be needed to spur low-income families to participate in community building activities. Low-income families usually lack time and money (Leung, 2005), and face higher risks of emotional distress arising from unstable relationships with family members and peers, leaving them incapable or unwilling to partake in community events (Ackerman, Kogos, Youngstrom, Schoff & Izard, 1999; Dodge, Petite & Bates, 1994). As Leung (2005), Ha (2007) and Coates (1997) note, building communities with low-income families first requires satisfying the families’ physiological needs and being more socially aware of their existing hardships and social exclusion. This could happen in numerous ways - depending on the context. For instance, Ha (2007) argues that a way to reduce feelings of social exclusion felt by the low-income residents is through improving the physical deterioration of their houses, thereby reducing the visible socio-economic division arising from inequalities between the lower and upper economic classes. Carolyn (1997), on the other hand, suggested using parent training programs to first strengthen family networks of socially isolated low-income families and improve their social competence, before guiding them into community involvement.

Similarly, Singapore has taken steps to support the low-income families. In addition to providing short-term financial reliefs through the Comcare Assistance Schemes and food vouchers, the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) also oversees social agencies within residential estates, such as the Social Service Offices (SSO)² and Voluntary Welfare Organizations (VWOs) (National Council of Social Service, 2016; National Council of Social Service, 2015). The Family Service Centers and BSS are part of the VWOs, and together with the SSOs, their social workers provide non-financial support to low-income residents through holding counseling sessions, education

² Social Service Office (SSO) is an agency under the purview of the Ministry of Social and Family Development. Its main role is to bring social assistance such as Comcare, job matching and family services closer to those who need it. It does not involve itself in community building efforts. Comcare assistance is one of the main cash transfer scheme provided for low-income Singaporeans.

Source: <https://www.msf.gov.sg/Divorce-Support/Divorce-Support/Support-Services/Pages/Social-Services.aspx>

services and referral services (Briscoe, 2006). Some have also gone door-to-door to establish personal relationships with the low-income families before encouraging them to participate in community events. However, it is important to note that FSCs and VWOs are more invested in strengthening community ties than the SSOs, which are more involved in disbursing financial assistance to the low-income families.

While policies are in place to support the low-income families, there hasn't been extensive studies on how effective these forms of support have been in encouraging the involvement of low-income residents in community building. This PAE project hence hope to uncover some of the low-income residents' perspectives on community building, to shed light on how successful these initiatives have been.

2.1 Analytical framework

To ensure a holistic analysis of communities with low-income families in Singapore, we have relied on existing literature to design a macro and micro analytical framework that can help us study how communities can be strengthened. Secondary sources, such as government-linked websites, local newspaper articles and reports, are used to support the framework's applicability to Singapore.

Macro framework

The macro framework provides an **overarching governance framework that allows us to analyze the roles and interactions among different actors in the community building process**. This includes the Government, Voluntary Welfare Organizations (VWOs) such as BSS and the Family Service Centers (FSCs), community leaders as well as the community residents. Using this framework (illustrated in **Graph 1** in the following pages) would guide our understanding on the current relationships between these actors, and how future relationships could develop to improve the process of community building. This is important as the appropriate level of involvement by each stakeholder can influence residents' sense of community.

In Singapore, the major community-building actors include the privately-run community VWOs and the Government-linked grassroots organizations and/or committees. The prevalence of the former, which includes organizations like the BSS and FSCs, is largely attributed to the Government's overall social strategy of relying on the VWOs to help deliver social services to the intended beneficiaries effectively (National

Council of Social Services, 2016; Channel News Asia, 2016). To ensure that VWOs are equipped with adequate resources and capabilities, the Government actively helps VWOs enhance their organizational strengths through funds such as the VWO-Charities Capability Fund (VCF)³ or through registering VWOs as Family Service Centers (FSCs) (Refer to **Appendix B** for more information on FSCs). Today, FSCs receive substantial financial support and guidance from the Government on the types of services they should offer. These services include remedial, preventive and developmental programs to meet the needs of families as well as initiatives for community building (Briscoe, 2006). There are currently over 41 FSCs run by VWOs. They are mandated by the government to have a community building component in their services (Family Service Center, 2017).

On the other hand, Government-linked grassroots organizations falls directly under the purview of a statutory board known as the People's Association. Unlike the VWOs, grassroots organizations such as the Residents' Committee (RC)⁴ and the Community Club Management Committee (CCMC)⁵ are run by resident volunteers appointed or approved by the People's Association. As they lack the expertise to conduct social services such as counseling and developmental programs, they are set up to primarily serve as a link between the Government and its residents, and to build communities within the residential neighborhood (People's Association, 2017).

³ The VCF helps to enhance the professional and services capabilities of the VWOs providing social services in Singapore. VWOs can tap into VCF for co-funding of training, scholarships, pilot projects, etc.

⁴ Residents' Committee (RCs) are set up within public residential blocks and run by resident volunteers to promote cohesiveness amongst residents. Interested RC volunteers have to be approved by the People's Association. Refer to **Appendix B** for more information.

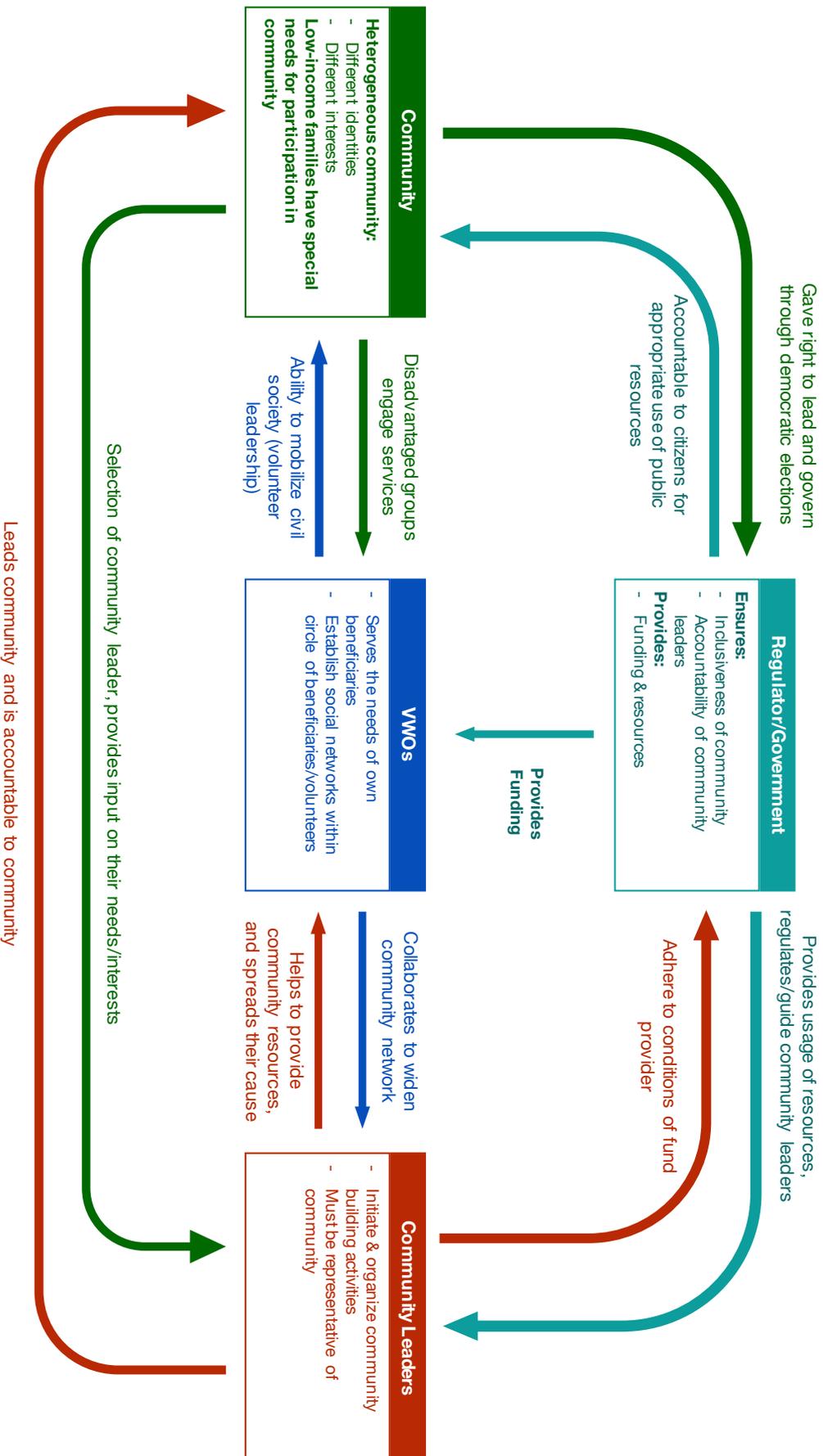
Source: https://www.pa.gov.sg/Our_Network/Grassroots_Organisations/Residents_Committees

⁵ Community Club Management Committee (CCMC) help build and maintain community clubs (CCs). CCs are common spaces for people of all races to come together, build friendships and promote social bonding. Each CC serves about 15,000 households or an average of 50,000 people. Refer to **Appendix B** for more information.

Source: https://www.pa.gov.sg/Our_Network/Grassroots_Organisations/Community_Club_Management_Committees
https://www.pa.gov.sg/Our_Network/Community_Clubs

Graph 1

The Macro Analytical Framework: Possible Interactions between Stakeholders



Government

Existing literatures suggest that the Government's role in the community can be analyzed from three angles. The first being the extent which the Government, as elected representatives, has taken care of the community's collective interest. This means ensuring an equal access to the community by all segments of society, including the often marginalized low-income families. Equal representation is a prerequisite for strong communities where all residents are involved in management, decision making, and leadership in the community. (Greenberg, Cohen & Mosek, 2016). Furthermore, the tendency for social clusters to form based on similar background, experience and ethnicity calls for a regulator that can facilitate inclusiveness (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001). In Singapore, the Government has tried to address inclusiveness through urban planning decisions where low-income rental housing are strategically mixed with owner occupied housing. There is still a substantial stock of over 200,000 rental and owner-occupied HDB apartments in the Central Region. The spread of rental blocks over the entire island is also evident in the HDB residential property report (Housing & Development Board, 2014a).

The second aspect pertains to the degree which the Government should regulate community efforts and enforce accountability of community leaders/VWOs. Ground up initiatives have a tendency to invite various informal partnerships between members of community (Nelson & Zadek, 2000). Unlike formal duties of civil servants that are bounded by the rule of law, the decision-making mechanisms at the community level may be less structured and prone to abuse. This puts the Government in the position of ensuring that there is a certain amount of policing to prevent abuse, for example, ensuring that residents are not taken advantage of by community leaders. The Government also has the mandate of acting on behalf of the largest interest of the community and stopping community efforts that may arouse divisiveness rather than togetherness. In Singapore, sensitive issues related to race, religion or homosexuality are regarded with extra caution and community events will not be treated as an exception.

Critics of strong policing however argue that an effective community will monitor the behavior of its members naturally and apply incentives according to their conformity to social norms accepted within the community (Bowles & Gintis, 2002). Nevertheless, an over-reliance on participation by the community may run contrary to the notion of a

representative government where elected officials are delegated tasks of policy making and execution (Smith & Beazley, 2000). The overly reliant on participation approach might also weaken the coordinating role of the local government and erode the roles and responsibilities of locally elected representatives (Gaventa, 2004).

In the case of Singapore, the Members of Parliament (MPs) hold advisory roles in the Resident's Committees (RCs) and commonly oversee their grassroots activities. While they are not directly involved in the day-to-day planning and execution of community events, they can decide on the type and how community events should be organized. Furthermore, as MPs can override decisions on how most community resources are utilized (e.g. public spaces at void decks, facilities in community centers), they can influence other community stakeholders⁶ access to them. (refer to **Appendix B** for more on a typical organizational structure of RCs/CCs). How this affects community within building in general and whether it really benefits residents will be analyzed in the next section of the report.

Thirdly, the way which the Government interacts with the other community stakeholders could also be analyzed from its potential role as a source of fund-provider. This is especially relevant for communities with low-income families where the community may not have sufficient finances to run its activities (Leung, 2005). As a fund-provider for the VWOs or community leaders, the Government can expect community programs or events to align with its own agendas (Guo, 2007).

For example, the Government will not hesitate to ban events that may challenge the racial and religious cohesiveness in Singapore, or heavily regulate events related to homosexuality issues. These may or may not be in the interest of community depending on the validity of these bans that is beyond the scope of this paper. However, such restrictions may generally result in less diversified community events or less-inclusive community events (Chua, 2000), such as in the eyes of the LGBT⁷ community if they feel they have a valid agenda to advocate for through community events. Another example is regarding the restricted operations of Family Service Centres (FSCs). Even though FSCs are run by VWOs, the fact that it receives a substantial amount of funding from the Government means that it has to comply with the Government's main strategic direction

⁶ This includes BSS, FSC and also individual residents

⁷ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender

towards community building. A study has found that FSCs feel that their relationship with the Government is too restrictive on their own autonomy and freedom when in reality, using their own methods may in fact be more effective in building communities successfully (Briscoe, 2006).

Community Leaders

Community leaders are broadly defined to be any resident or group of residents that organize community events or have an interest in community building and have led in this agenda. In the case of Singapore, community leaders could be volunteers of VWOs, grassroots members affiliated to the government such as RC residents, or independent residents involved in community work. A caveat is that community leaders do not necessarily refer to residents holding a leadership position per se but rather anyone who actively contributes by leading community related activities. The relationship between community leaders and other community stakeholders is found to depend on two major factors: (i) **how the leaders are selected** and (ii) **whether community leaders can straddle between dual roles of community representatives and as liaising partners** with fund providers like the Government or VWOs.

The procedures for selecting community leaders can be democratic, through nomination by members or community groups, self-selection or through informal appointments by other community actors (e.g. VWOs). Each procedure may have its own advantages and disadvantages. For instance, if community leaders are nominated within community based organizations or other partners, such as Community Clubs (CCs)⁸, partners may “cherry-pick” representatives deemed easy to work with (Edwards, Goodwin, Pemberton & Woods, 2001). For self-selection or democratic nomination processes, leadership renewal could be a challenge if experienced community leaders form domination of cliques and new challengers are nervous to take over (Taylor, 2003). If so, the legitimacy of community leaders may be compromised.

In the case of Resident’s Committee (RC) for example, it requires the nomination of two other non-family residents of the community. Currently however, there is a phenomenon of entrenched interests of well established RC members and certain

⁸ Residents’ Committee (RCs) are set up within public residential blocks and run by resident volunteers to promote cohesiveness amongst residents while Community Clubs (CCs) are common spaces for people of all races to come together, build friendships and promote social bonding. Refer to **Appendix B** for more information on RCs and CCs.

barriers of entry to the committee that will be elaborated in the problem analysis. Depending on the methods through which these community leaders are selected, it may affect how representative community leaders are in the community. For community leaders to be effective, they need to resonate with the needs of the community and at least be recognized as someone who is acting or speaking on behalf of the community.

Additionally, community leaders are found having to manage dual roles of being a community representative and having to liaise and deal with demands of fund providers (Taylor, 2003). When the interests of fund providers and the community are in conflict, community leaders will have a difficult role playing the middleman. For example, in the case of RC led community events, they may be obliged to invite the Member of Parliament (MP) in their constituency to attend the events. The involvement of MPs may change how the event is organized - for example, prioritizing the MP's schedule and attracting the attention of the media that results in events being heavily regulated or centered around showing positive sides of the MP. This undermines the initial spirit of organizing the event and may compromise the interests of the community. This problem will be further elaborated in the analysis section.

To execute their role well, community leaders such as RC members have to straddle effectively between meeting the needs of the fund provider yet still not over-compromising on the interests of the community. Ultimately, some level of compromising is necessary on both sides of the fund provider and the community in order for the community event to be executed well. How community leaders manage this compromise will affect their legitimacy within communities (Gaventa, 2004). They must develop enough trust with their own community as well as with government officials who are often the fund providers (Gaventa, 2004).

VWOs (including BSS and Family Service Centers (FSCs))

Lastly, non-profits, which are usually located within the community of interest, are found to possess the ability to mobilize the community on a massive scale towards a common goal. This is particularly true in Singapore, given that many VWOs have received additional resource support from the Government to expand their operations and to expand the existing community networks of beneficiaries and volunteers they have (Keyes, Schwartz, Vidal & Bratt, 1996).

In fact, Brown & Henkin (2014) notes that developing alliances across diverse organizations, such as the VWOs is necessary to foster social capital across vulnerable segments of society. Since Singapore's VWOs usually target niche beneficiaries, such as BSS on youths from low-income families and Thye Hua Kwan on the elderly, collaboration among the VWOs can more effectively bring different groups of beneficiaries together to strengthen social capital across segments.

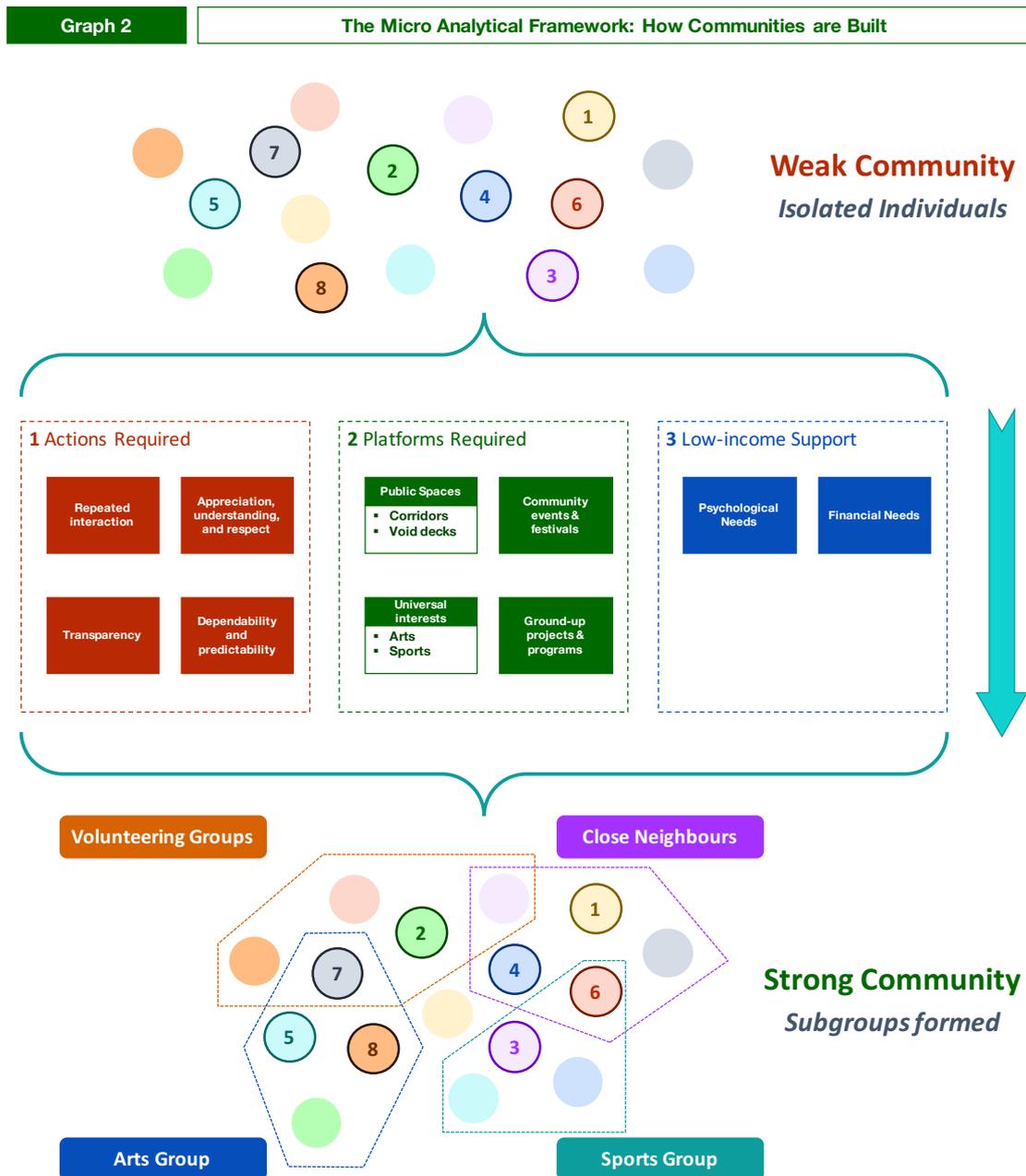
By the same reason, this also makes VWOs important in helping the low-income residents integrate with other residents of the neighborhood and invoking a sense of cause for the low-income in the neighborhood. VWOs such as BSS would have established good relations and networks in the neighborhood that would help them to better address low-income needs, and integrate them into the wider community. At the same time, other services that these VWOs provide to beneficiaries, such as within family strengthening and material support, may be necessary to support low-income families before easing them into the community (Ha, 2007; Webster-Stratton, 1997).

Micro framework

The micro framework explores how communities are formed in terms of social networks and relationships at an individual level. While the idea of a community is discussed as one entity, it should be in reality be seen as a large social network comprising of many sub social networks of connected individuals. There is a limit to a person's social circle known as the Dunbar's number that puts the number of people that one can stay socially connected to, at any point, to be 150 (Dunbar, 2016). Hence, while a person may not be connected to everyone in the community, he can be part of sub social networks/ subgroups. How these sub networks overlap, interact and identify themselves affects how each person identifies himself or feels connected to the larger community (Backstrom, Huttenlocher, Kleinberg & Lan, 2006). The micro framework is thus a framework that analyzes the processes in which a person can be part of these sub social networks and how these sub groups can overlap and interlink to form a larger complex network (which **Graph 2** in the following page proposes this process).

Firstly, we need to recognize that a neighborhood may comprise of people with multiple identities. A person alone may identify himself based on ethnicity, gender, income segment, family structure, beliefs or interests. Hence, for two people to start seeing themselves as having something common, there is a necessity for (i) **repeated**

interaction, (ii) appreciation, understanding and respect for each other, (iii) transparency in interaction as well as (iv) a long term predictability⁹ of perceptions about one another (Wagner & Fernandez-Gimenez, 2008).



In addition, it is fundamental to note that low-income families might have additional psychological needs that need to be addressed. Financial stress from the lack of basic necessities including food, school supplies, housing rent and time can contribute to

⁹ People having consistent expectations about one another and learning how to interact with each other predictably that helps to ultimately develop greater trust among one another

anxiety and feelings of hopelessness and demoralization (Belle Doucet, 2003). Poverty-related stress can also lead to attention problems, depression (Santiago, Wadsworth & Stump, 2011) and children from low-income families may be more withdrawn than others (Bessa, 2012). The poor in Singapore is likely to experience similar problems. Hence, the role of VWOs is important to help the low-income alleviate these various forms of stress that may impede their involvement in community building.

Moreover, platforms and mediums that provide opportunities for these interactions need to be present. First, this may be done through common interests such as the sports or the arts during community events. For instance, Schulenkorf, Thomson, and Schlenker (2011) conclude that sports events can be “a booster, and a catalyst for social capital” if integrated with wider reforms, while Derek Lumpkins believes in the arts as a way to foster people's ties to each other and their community (Crowley, 2012). Second, festivals have also been found to demonstrate a “sense of place” through shared experience and collective knowledge, leading to a shared worldview and social cohesion (Arcodia & Whitford, 2007; Derrett, 2003). Last but not least, public spaces can act as mediums and encourage frequent interaction while a variety of recreational facilities like playgrounds, fitness corners, multi-purpose courts, reflexology paths and corridor spaces are opportunities of interaction (Heng, 2017).

The social networks that emerge from these platforms then form smaller communities that allow individuals to identify themselves according to how they have met initially, such as through an art or sport-based interest group, or through other common interests and needs. We define these smaller communities as subgroups and there can be various subgroups within a community. For instance, a group of senior residents who enjoys doing tai-chi together can be considered as a sub-group as the social ties amongst these senior residents are stronger than with the wider community. Similarly, VWOs such as BSS have their own social networks of volunteers and beneficiaries within the community whom they are likely to have tighter bonds with than with other segments of the community. This makes BSS, its volunteers and beneficiaries another subgroup. With multiple subgroups within the community that are formed for different reasons, enough overlap must happen between them to prevent isolated social enclaves from forming.

The ties between sub groups are crucial for creating new opportunities, enabling resource and information diffusion, and for the successful integration of different social groups (Clark, 2007). If too strong ties are built within each sub group, it may lead to social fragmentation. However, when enough members of a neighborhood are part of different sub-groups, the links between these subgroups are drawn, forming a larger web of connections and relationships. It is these numerous relationship linkages that eventually make up a community.

2.2 Research methodology

While literature reviews and our analytical frameworks provide a theoretical backing to how communities with low-income families can be strengthened, primary research in the form of interviews allows us to obtain insights and ground sentiments on community building activities. We chose to study the Bukit Ho Swee (BHS) neighborhood upon BSS's request. BHS has high concentration of low-income families and is the first neighborhood which BSS provided their services. This ensures that there will be sufficient samples of BSS beneficiaries and low-income families required to fulfill the our objectives for this project.

We conduct personal interviews with (1) residents living in rental blocks, (2) BSS's representatives, (3) a Residents' Committee (RC) representative and (4) representatives from a Family Service Centre (FSC) located in BHS. Interviews with residents living in rental flats allow us to gain access to more low-income households as household monthly income has to fall below \$1,500 to stay eligible in the scheme¹⁰. Out of the 46 interviews conducted with BHS residents, at least 27 are low-income households¹¹. Respondents' age spans from 7 to 83, with 10.9% youths, 69.6% adults and 19.6% elderly¹². Average residency stay is 9.7 years and 84.8% have children residing in the household. Across households with children, the average number of children is 2.9 and

¹⁰ While certain blocks in Bukit Ho Swee has been identified by the Government as rental flats, some residents are found to be owners than tenants. One of the reasons is because BHS is one of the oldest housing estates in Singapore, where some residents had bought their units before the Government introduce the rental scheme. Some residents have also revealed that their tenancy with the Government would end soon due to an increase in monthly household income. We did not treat these residents as "low-income".

¹¹ This figure is computed based on households who were willing to share their monthly income. 7 residents have denied to reveal personal financial information.

¹² The age groups are defined as Youth for less than 21, Adults between 21 and 64, and Elderly as larger than or equal to 65 years old.

average household size is 4.1 persons, greater than HDB's average of 3.4 persons (Housing Development Board, 2014b). Interviews were conducted in 3 HDB blocks, namely Block 48 Lower Delta Road, Block 42 and 44 Beo Crescent Road.

Interviews with Bukit Ho Swee Residents

To obtain relevant insights, we have conducted semi-structured one-to-one interviews. Interviews were chosen over fixed survey questionnaires so that the interviewer can ask personalized questions that are catered based on responses and delve deeper to obtain genuine respondents' perspectives. Such one-to-one conversational approach has been found to be more comfortable for respondents (Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick, 2008), especially for questions that are politically sensitive (e.g. topics related to the Government's community building policies). This also explains why interviews are deliberately chosen over focus group discussions despite the latter being more efficient. Focus groups discussions may have a likelihood of masking honest opinions through encouraging Groupthink (Boateng, 2012).

Interview questions were organized into 6 parts: (I) Interviewee's general feelings about the BHS neighborhood and his perception about the current community networks (II) Interviewee's understanding of the community building activities ongoing in BHS (III) Interviewee's perception of his/her own role in community building (IV) Interviewee's perception of BSS's role in community building (V) Interviewee's perception of the Government's role in community building, particularly through RCs and Community Clubs (CCs) and (VI) Interviewee's perception of relative stakeholder's role (including his/her own) in community building. Basic personal information such as job security, interests, personality, family relationship stability were also collected (Refer to **Appendix C** for the list of interview questions).

While most questions were kept open-ended to uncover personal insights, some questions required interviewees to select from a list of options. This meant that in each of the 6 sections, a few questions were flagged as quantitative questions to serve as a basic statistic that can be compiled and consolidated across samples. We had not strictly followed the sequence of interview questions nor treat the questions as fully prescriptive to ensure that each interview is conducted at a pace and in a direction most comfortable and relevant to the interviewee. Hence, while quantitative questions were compulsory,

open-ended questions were asked flexibly. The answers solicited from each interviewee were then re-categorized according to the initial interview questions.

Techniques to ensure accuracy, consistency and unbiasedness in interviews were also used. For instance, to reduce bias, we refrained providing suggestions to elicit more elaborated responses when respondents face difficulties giving a comprehensive answer. Instead, we designed questions based on their responses to encourage elaboration. This has also helped us identify inconsistencies in responses, if any. For example, if the respondent had indicated that he was once a community volunteer, further questions related to how he was involved and his expectations during his involvement would be probed. These questions would give a more accurate picture of the extent of his involvement and help bridge any misunderstandings he may have on what community volunteering means.

Quantitative findings from fixed questions were analyzed using Excel while qualitative findings were analyzed through computer software NVivo. NVivo can extract and categorize insights in useful ways. It's multi-dimensional evaluation allows us to draw systematic differences, trends and patterns amongst key words in answers to community building roles and efforts. This makes it possible for us to compute the number of times certain common themes arise, hence allowing some qualitative responses to be represented numerically. For example, to quantify the number of respondents who see community events as a platform for fostering social integration, respondents who used terms such as “bonding”, “gathering” and “making friends” will be coded as individuals who are aware of the social integrative component behind community events.

Interviews with Other Community Stakeholders

We have also conducted interviews with representatives from BSS, FSC and the RC. These interviews provide deeper insights to how community activities organized by either the Government or VWOs are initiated. Interview questions were structured with the following sub-goals in mind:

- The extent of collaboration between the VWOs and the Government (i.e. RCs and CCs), and between different VWOs in community building
- The incentives and disincentives various community organizations have for collaborative efforts with one another

-
- If the various community organizations share similar goals, values and philosophies
 - If parallels exist between residents' perception of them and their own perception of their roles in the community

Similar to the interviews with BHS residents, we did not strictly adhere to a fixed set of interview questions. Rather, they were adapted according to the responses.

3.0 Analysis of Findings

3.1 Macro Analytical Framework Analysis

We use both our macro and micro analytical conceptual framework to analyze the interview responses from BHS's various community stakeholders (i.e. residents, BSS, RC and FSC). Starting with the macro analytical framework allows us to decipher the quality of interaction among community stakeholders and to evaluate if they have been ideal for community building. Interviews with FSC, RC, BSS and BHS residents revealed three main findings (1) **community stakeholders have not engaged in tight collaboration with each other**, (2) **some community leaders such as RC members¹³ may not be fully representative of the community**, and (3) there are **negative implications linked to the Government's existing funding arrangement for community stakeholders**.

We first observe that VWOs such as BSS and FSCs do not have tight collaboration with one another. As shared by both BSS and FSC, collaborations with other organizations are rare due to different values, working styles and priorities. For instance, while BSS and FSC are on colloquial terms, both have different target groups and slightly different community building philosophies. BSS believes in relying on the community to increase social mobility and is focused on helping the low-income families with youths while the FSC relies on the Asset-based Community Development¹⁴ model and how the model can be applied to the entire community ecosystem.

More importantly, a division also exists between the VWOs and other community stakeholders who directly fall under the Government's ambit, namely volunteers from the

¹³ As discussed in our analytical framework, the RC members are community leaders who are nominated within community based organizations (i.e. the RC itself). As community leaders, they take charge and run some community events with the intention to promote cohesiveness amongst residents. This makes it important for them to be representative of the community.

¹⁴ The key principles behind the ABCD model are: (1) Asset-based, (2) Full participation, (3) Relationship-driven, (4) Internally focused and (5) Creates citizen space. <http://www.sccfsc.sg/our-open-community/kampung-spirit/>

RCs and CCs¹⁵. This discourages collaboration, unless in the case of a simple resource sharing. Because of the RC and CCs' association with the Government, the RC interviewee admitted that community activities tend to be more politically driven and conscious. Some RC members joined the committee to express their support towards the ruling party, People's Action Party (PAP), while others joined with the intention to obtain some personal political benefits such as developing connections with the MPs and controlling community resources.

With the Government's backing, the RC and CCs are also seen to wield more power in the community. For instance, they have the capability to override some VWOs' decisions in the event of a conflict during collaboration or prioritize the use of certain community resources¹⁶ for themselves rather than for other community members. A BSS member shared the case of a co-organized soccer match for the low-income youths to illustrate their reluctance to partner with the RC. Because of the RC's co-involvement, the event scaled up, and had involved both the media and the estate's MP. Their involvement, however, was seen to divert the focus from creating a meaningful experience for the low-income youths (main beneficiaries) to attracting the media's attention. As shared by BSS, this was a collaborative experience where they felt that their primary intentions were overshadowed. Another example raised was the way the CC organizes their monthly welfare meetings with all major community stakeholders. In this meeting, all VWOs only had half an hour to express their concerns before the senior CC volunteers convey them to the MP in a separate meeting. With the lack of time and access to the real decision makers (i.e. MPs), BSS admitted that they usually only raise generic issues.

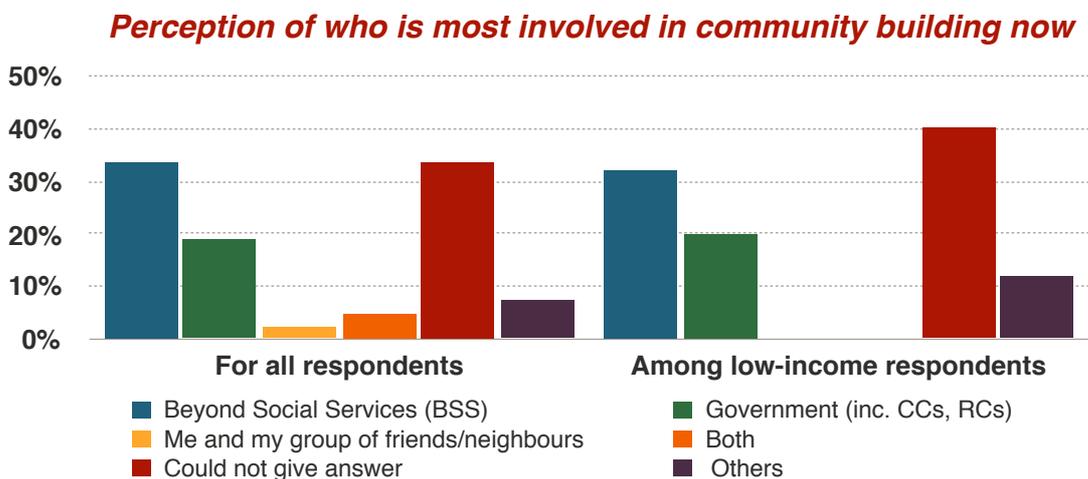
As commented by one of the interviewees, while regular interaction is initiated by the CCs and RCs, they seemed "customary in nature" as no real collaboration that leverages on each other's capabilities happens. With limited collaboration, the RC interviewee noted that not only are resources used inefficiently because different organizations are found organizing similar activities, these activities also often fail to maximize their intended outreach. For instance, there is inefficient use of resources as both BSS and the RC are observed to organize similar sports-related activities. BSS has

¹⁵ Based on the macro analytical framework, the RC and CCs are representative of the "Regulator/ Governor" (due to its direct association with the Government) and "Community Leaders" since RC and CC members are mostly resident volunteers who initiate and organize community building events.

¹⁶ This can include the use of public void decks and facilities in the community centers.

organized several Captain’s Ball matches while the RC has helped co-organize the annual PAP Community Foundation Sports Day. On top of duplicative events, event outreach was also limited to the existing community networks BSS or the RC each have. This compromises the total participation rates of events as compared to if the parties had collaborated. If BSS had tapped on the RC’s networks, it may be able to expand the scale of its sport-events to involve the larger community. Similarly, if the RC had tapped on BSS’s close ties with the low-income families, it could have attained higher turnout rates from the low-income segment of the community.

The second observation made is that as community leaders, RC and CC members might not be fully representative¹⁷ of the community. With the RC members being conferred the role of “community leaders” through an official application process that involves the nomination of only two other non-family residents, their legitimacy as genuine community drivers and representatives is questionable. This may mean that residents may not feel that the RC members really understand their needs or interests and hence will not feel obliged to be part of the community events organized by RC. For example, when residents were asked on which stakeholder is currently most involved in the community, most turned to BSS volunteers (33.3%) as compared to the RC members (19.1%), hinting that more residents may feel that RC members have not really engaged them effectively in community events and engaging their interests, as compared to BSS.



A deeper explanation to residents’ poorer perception of the RC members goes back to the RC members’ potential political inclinations – a similar reason why the VWOs are reluctant to collaborate with them. As mentioned previously, residents may join the

¹⁷ As mentioned in the earlier section of this paper, representativeness refers to having acknowledgement from other residents as having the legitimacy to act or speak on behalf of other residents.

RC due to reasons such as gaining more control of community resources and establishing connections with the MPs. This creates a power separation between the RC members and other residents where the former wields higher power. In fact, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs George Yeo had earlier observed this and commented that the RC and CC members are sometimes “a small elite, which holds power in a community and blocks access to the government for a wider group of residents, rather than facilitating it” (Briscoe, 2006). Clearly, some of Singapore’s community leaders attained this status not because of a widespread acceptance by the general community, but based on an association with the Government. While RC members have contributed by initiating community building activities such as the annual National Day dinners and block parties for all residents to attend, some exclusivity over their status as “RC members” could create a disconnection between other residents and them, hence hindering the residents’ participation. When low-income residents were given an open-ended question on why they had not joined RC events, about 20% of them attributed it to not having received any invitations or that they were not close to the RC members – almost alluding to a disconnection between both parties. This is contrary to the responses on their non-involvement of BSS events, of which none expressed the absence of personal invitation as a reason.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge that there are certain benefits that RC members have contributed to the community building process. Singapore has just started out on a more ground up approach to community building and time needs to be given for residents to truly gain momentum and enthusiasm towards these efforts. For example, one reason explaining the low response rates of projects such as community participatory design (CPD) of urban spaces’ is that most residents do not feel an urgent need to participate (Ang, 2016). This suggests that while ground-up approaches are taking time to gain momentum, the RC still has an important role to organize community events and help to integrate residents together. Improvements have also been made to increase the effectiveness of RCs through the setting up of the RC Council in 2012 that guides RCs to hold more regular conversations with residents of different social backgrounds (People’s Association, 2017).

Finally, we noted that the way funding and resources are provided by the Government to encourage community building was another aspect that was telling of how communities are shaped in BHS. Expectedly, the Government fully funds the RC and

CC activities and makes it easier for the RCs to utilize CC facilities for their activities. On the other hand, the amount of funding for the VWOs depends on how aligned their activities are to the Government's interests¹⁸. An interviewee commented that this arrangement allows the Government to "social engineer" the types of communities it prefers, which in the process, may marginalize certain groups, hence contrary to facilitating the formation of an all-inclusive community. Chua (2000)¹⁹ has also expressed concerns over the Government's extensive penetration of community life as the deeply entrenched network of grassroots organizations and groups it funds may restrict space or incentive for the development of other independent groups to produce different or even complementary thinking and activities.

3.2 Micro Analytical Framework Analysis

As mentioned in the conceptual framework section, the micro framework outlines the process of how individual residents can form strong social connection within the community. This generally requires an individual to not only forge strong ties with other residents but also to ensure that the residents he is connected with comes from different subgroups so that the community ends up having a larger web of relationships rather than multiple isolated social enclaves.

From our interviews with BHS residents, we observe two phenomena. Firstly, **most residents are found to have weak social ties with other community members.** Secondly, in the event where a resident has some social ties with other residents, **these ties are mostly confined to a particular sub-group.** In other words, there is little overlap between the different community subgroups.

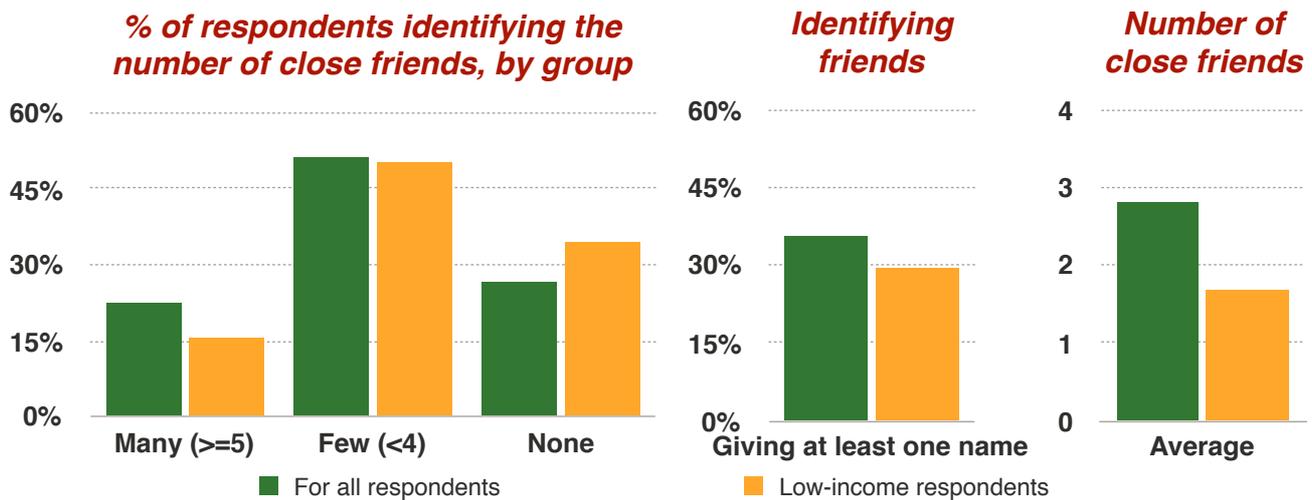
(i) Residents are not close to the community

While 63.0% of BHS residents revealed that they have positive feelings towards their neighborhood, most do not have a strong attachment to it. 8.7% of the respondents can be considered disconnected as they do not have any friends from the neighborhood. While the rest have friends, only a fifth of the respondents indicated having more than 5 close friends. When further probed on whether respondents could provide their close

¹⁸ As previously mentioned in the paper, VWOs that operate FSCs receive substantially more funding than a non-FSC VWO because the former is required to meet the Government's objectives, in exchange for the funding received.

¹⁹ Quoted from Briscoe, C. (2006). A study of the community work approaches of family service centres in Singapore (Doctoral dissertation).

friends' names, more than 65% could not provide more than one name - a surprise, given that remembering each other's names is commonly expected amongst friends. Some interviewees also admitted that even if they hang out with fellow residents, they do not engage in deep conversations nor share personal woes. Most conversations were limited to short generic greetings. Evidently, the community networks among BHS residents may not be strong enough for the residents to rely on as dependable sources of support and resources.



(ii) Limited overlapping of community subgroups in BHS (presence of isolated social enclaves)

We also observe that some of the main subgroups in the BHS neighborhood include (i) BSS's low-income youth beneficiaries, (ii) senior citizens active in Thye Hwa Kuan activities and (iii) active RC members and attendees of RC events. This list is non-exhaustive as previously mentioned in the conceptual framework section, subgroups can arise through different means, such as having a common interest in a sport. Based on the interviews, however, we found that there are insufficient overlaps of community subgroups as residents who belong to these subgroups do not interact much with residents from other subgroups or the wider community. For instance, none of the senior citizens have joined BSS's activities before, meaning that BSS was never a common platform for interactions between senior citizens and BSS's low-income youth beneficiaries. Observations on some residents having a stronger attachment to certain community clusters more than other residents could also suggest an insufficient overlap of community subgroups. For example, since 62.9% of the low-income residents have attended BSS events as compared to 33.3% of non low-income residents, low-income residents may have identified themselves more strongly with BSS. This suggests that

there is a subgroup comprising of BSS and low-income residents which may not have established strong social links with other residents of the community.

Causes for weak social ties at a micro level

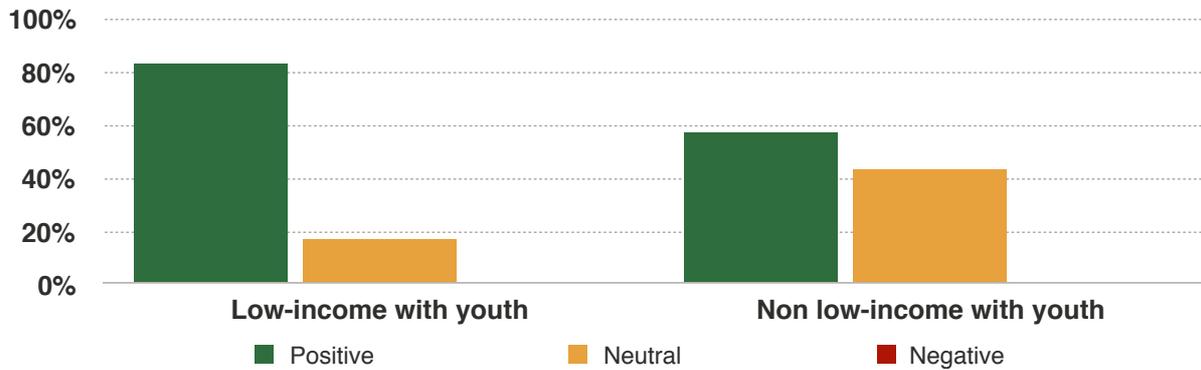
Based on the understanding that there are (i) weak social ties amongst BHS residents and (ii) the lack of overlap in sub-groups, we further use the micro analytical framework to study the reasons behind both of these phenomena. Our analysis suggests that the main causes behind weak community participation include (1) **the way community platforms are designed, accessed and utilized**, and (2) **lack of opportunities for individuals to interact meaningfully and build interpersonal relationships**.

Firstly as outlined in our micro analytical framework, community platforms in the form of public spaces and community events are necessary to help people with different backgrounds meet, socialize and bond. With regards to public spaces, interviews with BHS residents reveal that while 90% of them found it easy to find a public space to hang out, 60% are not using it. Using Nvivo to analyze the qualitative responses of the latter group reveals that despite the awareness of public spaces, they don't use them because they either feel it's irrelevant as a place to hang out with friends (20% of total respondents), or because they prefer utilizing urban malls for its leisure value (15% of total respondents). In fact, one respondent commented that his lack of interest in public spaces was because he had hoped for these spaces to be vast and open enough to allow picnics. Additionally, several interviewees, including the BSS representative, have also suggested other factors that hinders the effective use of public spaces such as the lack of awareness of how public spaces could be booked and the misperception that booking public spaces is a hassle. The latter is due to RC/CCs being perceived to enjoy a higher priority in using public spaces, by definition of their conferred role as mentioned in the macro analysis.

On community events, we found that several stakeholders (BSS, FSC, and RC) are often interested to design community events that cater only to their specific subgroup and/or beneficiaries - from the BSS's youth-specific events such as its Ice Age Movie Outing and youth reading programs, to RC-organized events such as the BHS block

parties, Deepavali celebration and Chinatown Mid-autumn festival walking trail²⁰. Because of this, although residents have opportunities to participate in events that align with their interests, community events seemed to have encouraged the further congregation of existing sub-groups at the expense of developing stronger ties with the larger community.

Experiences with BSS activities for those who attended



In the context of BSS, we found most of its activities mainly target the low-income youths (BSS’s main beneficiaries). This meant that other residents unrelated to the low-income youths, such as senior residents and most non low-income families are not actively invited to participate in BSS’s events, leading to an outcome where they are less attached to BSS than BSS’s beneficiaries. The interview responses are telling. For low-income families with youths, 83% had a positive experience with BSS activities, citing reasons such as BSS activities having provided youths with a safe space for learning and development through events such as community soccer matches and its “*Care and Share Thank You Show*”. This is a significantly higher than the percentage of **non** low-income families with youths who have positive experiences with BSS (57%). It was also observed that it is less common for low-income families with youths to have positive feelings for the RC (41%). These differences in positive feelings could be because each subgroup have interacted more frequently with each other and developed stronger bonds with each other.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that there are reasons behind BSS’s heavy focus on the low-income youth. Some specialization can ensure the delivery of higher quality services. Given limited resources, it may also be only practical for BSS to organize

²⁰ While RC events are intended for all residents, our interview responses suggested that it is usually the same residents who attend these events. This may suggest that RC events are in reality, catered to a smaller group of residents.

events targeted at the youths instead of a larger community which would naturally demand for more resources. Evidently, while encouraging the interlink of different community subgroups is important and can be beneficial for the low-income families, expecting BSS to adopt a complete trajectory shift may not be in its beneficiaries' best interest. Hence, something BSS can work on to help low-income families connect with the wider community could be to collaborate with stakeholders who are already involved in organizing events for the masses, such as the RCs and FSCs.

The second reason behind weak community social networks is the lack of opportunity for residents to interact in a meaningful manner and develop interpersonal relationships. A plausible explanation derived from our interview responses could be that some community events are not organized in a way that promotes socializing, making new friends, and helping participants gain better understanding of each other. For instance, only 3 out of 46 respondents expressed that the RC/CC events had helped them foster closer ties with other residents in the neighborhood, while several others claimed that they do not always make new friends from these events. Even if residents have made new acquaintances from events such as BSS's swimming classes, some indicated that no further investments were made to strengthen the relationship after the community event. Many remained as acquaintances rather than sources of dependable support. The outlook is worse among residents who are less involved in the community.

Another reason to explain the lack of opportunities for repeated meaningful interaction opportunities amongst residents could be due to the overall low participation rate in community events. While 60% of the residents have participated in at least one event, only 19.5% participate at least one event a month. Residents' participation on different types of community events is rare too as while the participation rate of community events by the low-income residents is similar to the general BHS community, they had mostly attended BSS organized community events. When it comes to active community involvement, only a fifth of the respondents have served as a volunteer once and less than a tenth of respondents have roles in organizing committees before. The lack of time was most commonly cited as a reason behind the low participation rates by all respondents.

Additionally, specific to the low-income families, we found that the lack of sufficient emotional support could hinder their participation in community events. For instance,

several responses highlighted how the sense of helplessness they experience due to the dire situation they are in make attending community events difficult. A respondent also stated that she has to attend to her chronically ill son and has no extra mental capacity to spare, while the other had little motivation to attend community events due to her medical conditions. The low-income residents are observed experiencing emotional distress from various sources which may not be addressed by current community efforts. When they were probed for reasons behind their low participation rates in community events, the second most commonly cited reason²¹ (after time) was because community activities do not address their needs. This is contrary to the non low-income residents, whose second most cited reason for their low community participation was unawareness²².

Nevertheless, a few low-income families had shared the positive experiences they have with BSS and how the emotional support they receive from social workers motivates them to be more involved in community building. In the case of BSS, two residents openly shared that their willingness to volunteer with BSS is because BSS had provided direct social assistance to them (e.g. through receiving food rations or receiving emotional support from BSS staffs in times of crisis) and they want to repay the favor. However, as BSS will not be able to reach out to all the low-income families since some are not BSS's targeted beneficiaries, more has to be done in this area.

Lastly, it is worthy to note that although active community involvement in the BHS neighborhood is low, many residents harbor community-related aspirations. Among adults aged 65 and below, most (80%) see a personal role in the community and a sizable 60% believes that one should be active. Residents holding these perceptions are likely to be active in the community if circumstances allow, showing that the goal of having active community residents is probable.

²¹ 30% of the low-income residents cited "unmet needs" as a reason why they did not attend BSS events and 36% cited the same resident for why they did not attend RC events.

²² 40% for BSS, 29% for RC

4.0 Policy Recommendations

Based on the analysis above, this report suggests 5 comprehensive solutions requiring effort from all stakeholders. This section briefly explains the approach to these solutions, why other approaches were not considered, and how it addresses the problems above.

Firstly, we feel that community building should still be based on a ground up approach. There are limitations of top down organized community events by RC due to (i) political affiliations and lack of representativeness of RC members as mentioned in the macro analysis, as well as (ii) limitations of community events organized by separate VWOs such as BSS that only target their own circle of beneficiaries mentioned in the micro analysis. Hence, community building that encourages greater inclusivity and involvement from all residents have to emerge from a ground up approach that would organically see greater intersections in different social networks. With this in mind, solutions recommended surround the idea of creating an enabling ecosystem that will support and facilitate this ground up community building approach.

Secondly, to successfully create an ecosystem which encourage community building, collaboration from all stakeholders namely the government, RC, BSS, FSC, community leaders and the residents themselves is required. If each organization focuses on their own objectives, own methods and own resources there will be (i) an inefficient use of resource and missed synergies if stakeholders had collaborated as mentioned in the macro analysis and (ii) certain segments of the community such as the low-income not successfully integrating into the community mentioned in the micro analysis. Collaboration is needed for VWOs such as BSS to combine their beneficiary networks with other residents and help facilitate the integration of the low-income residents into the larger community.

Lastly, we are of the view that BSS should continue to focus on the needs of the low-income rather than expanding their strategies to try and engage other types of residents in community building. The engagement of the low-income with the larger community should be done through collaborations with other community organizations such as RC and FSCs instead. Currently, BSS does believe in the importance of engaging other non-beneficiaries to take interest in the lives of the low-income, but the

progress towards this has been slow due to their limited staff and resources. We feel that BSS can focus on the advantage that it has with the low-income, with accumulated levels of trust and reputation already established among this vulnerable segment. Trying to help the low-income integrate with other residents can be done more effectively by tapping on another organization's social networks.

Based on these approaches, the following 5 solutions are recommended with each explaining in greater depth how the objective of the above approaches are met.

Solution 1: Online Community Crowdsourcing Portal

As mentioned earlier, an enabling environment should be created to support ground up community building. Ultimately, the success of community building depends on whether individuals are empowered and have a sense of belonging and ownership to be part of the community. The role of the individual is hence still the focus and efforts should surround helping residents see their own relevance and stake in the community. This is aligned with definitions in literature and Beyond Social Service's (BSS) beliefs that other stakeholders should focus on empowering through enabling rather than leading community efforts. As can be seen from data collected however, most residents living in the sample area of Bukit Ho Swee still had not been actively involved in community building despite seeing themselves having personal role in the community²³ - an outcome that could be partially due to the lack of this enabling environment.

In lieu of this, we suggest that **there should be a one-stop online community portal that helps residents to crowdsource funds, human resources and any other form of support**. Similar to IndieGoGo, this portal will be an online crowdsourcing portal used to fund community projects. This online portal can be called [neighborhood name] For Me. Bukit Ho Swee (BHS) For Me will be used for the rest of this report for convenience. As a neighborhood bounded community online portal, BHS For Me can allow residents to pitch projects, get the resources and support needed to fund their projects, and allow residents to indicate their interest to be part of the project. It is hence also a social networking portal for residents that allows them to communicate with one another freely at their own convenience.

²³ Among adults aged 65 and below, most (80%) see a personal role in the community and a sizable 60% believes that one should be active.

For example, to facilitate resource sharing, there can a tab that allows residents to list out items they might not need at home and want to donate to community causes. In another tab that allows residents to pitch their ideas, there can also be a discussion board that allows residents to discuss the idea, connect with the project pitcher and provide help. One part of the portal can also have a direct link to the community club's booking facilities so that it's convenient for project pitchers to get a venue for their activities. To show government's support and to increase the vibrancy of the online portal, government can provide a 1-1 matching grant to all the money raised through the portal.

Currently, there are nationwide funding schemes such as *Our Singapore Fund*²⁴ and the *Good Neighbors Project Programme (GNP)*²⁵ created to support meaningful projects by Singaporeans. GNP for example, provides up \$10,000 to fund residents' ideas for long-term projects such as converting a void deck into community living rooms. However, how BHS For Me differs from these state-funded schemes is the fact that it encourages residents to crowdsource and rally support from each other, hence making the whole process from idea creation to implementation much more inclusive to the whole neighborhood. When other residents are funding projects in their own neighborhood, it also creates better awareness and recognition of their stake in the neighborhood.

These sort of crowdsourcing portals also allows much more flexibility for residents to form diverse social networks necessary for their ideas. It would encourage more overlap between different kinds of existing sub groups since residents can easily involve themselves in different projects fighting for various community causes. As compared to community events/ideas led by the RCs or VWOs, these projects also provide more residents with leadership roles since access to entry is low and there will not be the drawback of having to join groups with already entrenched interests. It would also allow more natural community leaders to emerge, addressing the problem of lack of representativeness of RC members.

²⁴ *Our Singapore Fund* has been created to support meaningful projects that build national identity or meet social and community needs. Source: <https://www.sg/oursingaporefund>

²⁵ *The Good Neighbours Project* is an initiative organized by the Housing & Development Board (HDB) and supported by the People's Association (PA). It hopes to encourage residents to initiate projects and activities to engage and bond with their neighbors.

Source: <http://www.hdb.gov.sg/cs/infoweb/community/hdb-community-week/hdb-friendly-faces-lively-places-fund-page>

The administrative management of these online community portals is expected to be done by the RC. This form of management would still expect some form of regulation or filtering of projects if they are deemed offensive or against the general interest of the community. Projects that outrightly threaten racial and religious harmony for example should be taken down. However, the general censorship of these project pitches should be kept to a bare minimum. It is hoped that this sort of crowdsourcing feature will help neighborhoods to reach a better consensus on what needs to be changed or improved in each neighborhood and provide the spontaneity, flexibility and efficiency in addressing community concerns.

The potential threat to this solution lies in the inclusiveness of the portal. Although younger generations are accustomed to internet, elderly people are in general unfamiliar with the operation. Meanwhile, as the low-income families tend to have less resources for sharing, their participation rate is also a concern. Hence, it is necessary for the administrative institutions such as the RC, to pay special attentions to the challenges while implementing this solution, and adopt respective measures (e.g. having online agents for the elderly and encouraging low-income residents to be activity organizers) to address the problems.

Solution 2: Improved Protocols of Engagement for Collaboration

As mentioned earlier, stakeholders should focus on working together and adopt a mindset of collaboration when endeavoring in community building efforts. Interviews with the representatives from FSC, BSS and the RC have also reflected that this is a weakness in the current status quo of relationships²⁶. Currently, there are many duplicative community events targeting different groups and surrounding different social networks, lack of communication between stakeholders and even a sense of competition for resources. While the different stakeholders admitted in the interviews that they recognize the need for collaboration, such occurrences are rare.

To tackle the problems addressed in the analysis section with regards to collaboration, there has to first be a right mindset adopted at the leadership level by all stakeholders and a leading by example on how to treat and engage other stakeholders. As mentioned in the analysis, current meetings between stakeholders do

²⁶ As discussed in analysis section, divergence in working style, values and target beneficiaries hinders collaboration.

not take place on an inclusive and open level. This is where the Members of Parliament (MPs) of each constituency has to set the direction and tone of how these collaborations can work on the basis of equal partnership rather than on top down directives from groups directly linked to the MPs (i.e. RCs, CCs). For example the MPs can start by joining the monthly meetings held for all major community stakeholders²⁷, openly engaging the VWOs in discussions and putting down their concerns as part of the agenda to solve by the next meeting.

Since the RC and CC take a lot of direction from the MP, it is only with such direct intervention by the MP would they understand the how much importance and value equal partnerships with other VWOs should be given. MPs should also have more frequent direct communication with other VWOs rather than depend on RCs to relay messages that will help re-balance the power-dynamics among these various stakeholders and create a more conducive environment for collaboration. This is also necessary to change attitudes on the ground and attitudes of RC members in terms of how they should engage and treat other VWOs.

Additionally, the intentions of collaboration should be further supported through better protocols of engagement with each other. Mindsets and behavioral dynamics that have existed for some time may be hard to change. Hence, intentions to actualize tighter collaboration should be supported with protocols that assure higher frequency of engagement. At the beginning of the collaboration process, opportunities for both sides to understand each other, clear up misunderstandings, and inspire new creative ways of organic collaboration is required. Other than monthly meetings where stakeholders can raise and address issues within the community to tackle them together, these “forced engagement” could take place through initiatives like (i) **going for regular site visits together**, (ii) **planning events together when interests overlap** and (iii) **offering excess resources to each other**.

i) Regular site visits: Stakeholders can organize door knocking visits in the neighborhood together to understand problems that residents are facing. Listening to the same feedback and clarifying questions together would encourage stakeholders to have a more common understanding of the problems and their individual role in tackling them.

²⁷ This is the monthly welfare meeting organized by the CC. Attendees to the meeting include major community stakeholders, which in the case of BHS, it involves BSS, FSC, RC and Thye Hua Kwan among others.

Appearing in these visits together also sends a positive signal to residents that stakeholders are working together and residents might even help to facilitate the collaboration if they have information on either party. This also reduces the tendency of residents having to “take a side” when it comes to volunteering with community organizations²⁸.

ii) Planning events together: The RC can also start to include VWOs in the planning of major community events like the National Day, Racial Harmony Day, Chinese New Year and Hari Raya etc. When beneficiaries, volunteers and social workers of each party are roped in, it immediately creates an overlap between the two social networks. People from each group would start developing better understanding for each other. For community outings or events that the VWOs are already organizing, they should also actively send invites to FSCs and RCs for them to rope in their own volunteers or beneficiaries. For BSS, this creates opportunities where the elderly segment from the FSCs and youth segment from BSS can interact, communicate and form deeper bonds. It benefits both organizations when different segments of the neighborhood mingle, take an interest and have a stake in the lives of other segments. It would also help the different stakeholder organizations to understand how they can better support each other through witnessing the interactions among different segments of beneficiaries.

iii) Offering excess resources: Different stakeholder organizations have different strengths and they should try to help each other in terms of resource sharing. The FSC in BHS for example, manages quite a large area at one of the HDB void decks, including a large common living room space, meeting rooms and conference rooms. These facilities are not always fully utilized and should be shared or rented cheaply to other VWOs like BSS. On the other hand, BSS has the benefit of being in the BHS neighborhood for a long time, established a very positive reputation and good social networks. Their volunteer base and connections in the neighborhood can also be used to help other stakeholders when they organize events.

However, given the current mistrust among these organizations, it may take a long time for this solution to effect. Mindset change and trust building cannot be achieved without long-term reciprocity. The success of collaboration hinges on how these

²⁸ As mentioned in the analysis, some residents found it difficult to volunteer for more than one community organization as they perceive organizations to be undergoing competition with one another.

stakeholders can overcome the bureaucracy within the organization. Another potential challenge to this solution is that collaboration, in the short term, may slow down the pace and efficiency of organizing community events or activities. Yet, this disadvantage may be overcome in the long run because the organizations, with continuing interactions, would become more cohesive.

Solution 3: Increasing Innovative Platforms for Interaction

Aligned with our general approach of trying to create a supportive environment for ground up community building, this has to involve adequate platforms that facilitate interactions between residents. Our analysis has revealed that there are limitations from relying too much on community events as platforms to facilitate community building. Firstly, participation rate was low because residents either lack time or are disinterested. Secondly, interaction across subgroups are limited as VWOs and the Government often organize events for specific subgroups instead of the entire community. Both reasons suggest for the Government and VWOs to look beyond their traditional strategy of organizing community events as means of gathering people. Instead, other platforms that could encourage favorable interactions among residents should be explored.

Alternative platforms could come from creating various kinds of sharing spaces in the community with the basic characteristics of (1) **enticing people to visit and stay**, (2) **making people feel safe and comfortable** and (3) **accessibility** (Phil, 2017). The advantages are plentiful. Because sharing spaces are readily available to residents at their convenience, time constraint is less of a concern - as compared to expecting residents to attend community events which occur at specific time slots. The freedom to decide how these sharing spaces could be used also allow residents with different needs and from different subgroups to gather for other purposes not bounded by the goals of specific VWOs or community groups²⁹.

A good example is how the South Central Community FSC transforms its center to create useable public spaces for its community (Refer to **Appendix D** for pictorial illustrations). To entice residents to visit, common spaces are specially designed with

²⁹ VWOs often organizes events that are in line with their overall objectives, specific to their target beneficiaries. For instance, because Thye Hua Kwan's main beneficiaries are senior citizens, their community activities tend to be elderly-centric and seldom involve the entire community.

wide open spaces and glass panels so that residents can enter and leave freely³⁰. Apart from its office area, large community sharing space such as chatting rooms and a Community Kitchen³¹ are also available to residents without additional charges. For instance, residents could congregate and use the Community Kitchen to cook food for other community members together in celebration of an event.

To promote reciprocity and to encourage residents to help one another, the FSC also uses its public space to encourage resource-sharing among its residents. As these platforms directly tap on the assets the community can currently provide, it gradually reduces the community's dependency on support that originates from outside the neighborhood (e.g. support from employed community staffs in the VWOs). In South Central Community FSC, such platforms come in the form of a "Goodwill Store"³² and an "Offers and Request Board"³³. The "Goodwill Store" is designed for the residents to share their goods with their neighbors freely. In this area, residents could donate and receive items (e.g. clothes, toys and stationeries etc.) without having to seek prior approvals. Similarly, the Offers and Request Board encourages residents to exchange information with one another. On the Offers Board, residents could indicate items which they can donate, while on the Request Board, residents could put up their requests (e.g. laptop loan) or express their dreams and aspirations.

Clearly, ways to encourage interaction goes beyond organizing community events for the neighborhood. A community would be considered ideal if it can serve as sources of support to those in need without having to rely on the facilitation of VWOs or the Government. Re-looking at how public spaces can be modified is a probable starting point. However, one should recognize that providing and maintaining effective public spaces that offer residents a range of amenities for free often comes with substantial infrastructure and manpower cost. Hence, while VWOs like BSS could take the lead in reshaping how influencing the design of public spaces, this has to come with resource support provided by the Government.

³⁰ For detailed information and photos, refer to: <http://www.sccfsc.sg/our-open-community/a-common-space/>

³¹ Residents can gather to prepare dishes together in the community kitchen or use the community kitchen to prepare food for their fellow residents. Free food and drinks are also usually available at the kitchen.

³² For detailed information and photos, refer to: <http://www.sccfsc.sg/our-open-community/the-goodwill-store/>

³³ For detailed information and photos, refer to: <http://www.sccfsc.sg/our-open-community/the-offers-and-request-board/>

Solution 4: Improving the effectiveness of community events

At the same time, although there are limitations to community events, there could still be improvements made to how these community events are conducted. Another problem suggested by our analysis is that existing community events have not been effective in developing friendships among residents who have attended them. As shown in our interview responses, residents who were actively involved in community events do not necessarily have more friends. This suggests that the current way community events are organized may not be most optimal in encouraging interaction amongst people – thus calling for the Government and VWOs to relook at how their events can better encourage attendees to continue keeping in touch with one another even after the event. In other words, how events can incentivize residents to continue investing in friendships or acquaintanceship formed during the event.

We suggest that more opportunities should be given for residents to interact and mix during the community event itself. For instance, organizers can introduce more mixing activities like self-introduction or ice-breaking initiatives at the start of their events to help make attendees comfortable with one another. They could also incorporate elements that require attendees to collaborate with one another during the event, such as group cooking and group art projects. Finally, one could consider ending events with a debrief that encourages residents to share his/her experiences with one another. These elements reduce the tendency of residents becoming passive attendees. Instead, they actively encourage people to reach out to one another, which hopefully could expand and deepen their social connections.

The success of this solution hinges on two important factors: (1) **the willingness of the residents in expanding their networks;** (2) **the ways that organizers incorporate these suggested elements.** Introverted residents may be discouraged in participating in these activities. And if the organizers exert too much pressure on participants in mobilizing them in ice-breaking or mixing activities, the event may backfire.

Solution 5: Empowering the emotional needs of low-income families

Communities can be sources of emotional support, particularly for low-income families. Research shows that the low-income, because of their financial instability, is more inclined to suffer from negative psychological states such as stress, fear and

humiliation (Narayan-Parker & Patel, 2000; Haushofer & Fehr, 2014). While a number of instrumental assistance (e.g. job training programs or financial support) have been adopted to empower the low-incomes in Singapore, they do not adequately focus on the low-income's emotional needs. Yet, as outlined in the paper earlier, not only can strong social support networks promote the low-income's resiliency in the face of adversity (Masten et al, 1990), they also encourage community participation by the low-income.

Currently, social workers from the FSCs provide some emotional support for the low-income by offering counseling services. However, as counseling sessions only happen at allocated time slots, the low-income may not be able to reach the social workers in times of need. This calls for the Government and VWOs to consider other avenues which can serve as strong sources of emotional support, available for the low-income without the constraints of formally assigned time appointments.

This could come in the form of self-help groups that aim to connect various low-income families together through friendships, rather than formal contracts. With strong connections with the low-income families, BSS can take the lead in BHS by facilitating the formation of tightly knitted clusters through encouraging members to share their experiences such as personal hardship and psychological setbacks with one another. To further motivate the low-income, residents who have successfully alleviated themselves from poverty could be included to help others overcome their difficulties. It is important to note that these self-help groups do not intend to isolate the the low-income from the wider community. Instead, it recognizes the need to create avenues of deeper mutual support on areas that are more personal to the the low-income. With greater emotional support, the low-income would then be encouraged to further contribute and be involved with the larger community – which in turn, benefits them more.

One of the greatest challenges to this solution is the willingness of participation by low-income residents in this subgroup. The lack of confidence, due to financial and emotional problems, may hinder their willingness in expanding social networks and sharing personal experiences, even within the low-income groups. (Refer to **Appendix E** for a summary table of the solutions).

5.0 Limitations and Future Research

In evaluating the BHS community, our research methodology focused on gathering feedback from the residents and other community stakeholders to get their feedback on the community building process. However, most community activities now are initiated by formal organizations such as the RC and VWOs, and these events are the products of internally-made decisions. An area that could thus be further explored is the factors that influences how organizational decisions are made, and whether they have wider implications on community-building activities.

For instance, our interview with the RC representative revealed that RCs work on a block budget system where there is pressure to fully utilize the budget by the end of each fiscal period. This has created inconsistencies in the frequency and scale of community events where larger and more events tend to congregate nearer to the fiscal year end. Here, whether resources are efficiently used at the best interest of the community is questionable. Further exploration of how community events are operationalized could therefore shed additional insights on whether these factors should be a source of concern when it comes to strengthening communities with low-income families.

Additionally, this research project was conducted only in one residential estate in Singapore. The relationship among various community stakeholders in other areas could however, be quite different from what is observed in BHS. For instance, it cannot be assumed that most VWOs have issues with the government-linked RCs or that residents definitely see VWOs playing a larger role in community building than the RCs in other neighborhoods. As the RCs and VWOs are independently run in each estate, it is expected that some differences would exist between the organizations in BHS and in other parts of Singapore. Thus, if we want to more accurately extrapolate our recommendations to the whole of Singapore, more samples (i.e. neighborhoods) should be tested.

6.0 Conclusion

As this PAE report suggests, geographically bounded communities are highly relevant in Singapore. In addition to ensuring an inclusive and cohesive living environment for all, it also provides the low-income families a source of support and help them better cope with their financial stresses. The lack of a strong community spirit in our

sample neighborhood however suggests problems inhibiting the community building process. Our macro analysis suggests that there are problems evolving community stakeholders (RC,BSS,VWO) not collaborating, the representativeness of community leaders such as RC members and funding arrangements that restrict the development of more diverse activities. Our micro analysis suggests that there are also problems with the accessibility and utilization of community platforms and the lack of opportunities for meaningful interactions between residents. Therefore, this report recommends 5 solutions that complement each other to solve the above problems. We suggest a ground up approach to community building through public spaces and an online community crowd-sourcing portal. Social networks between residents should also be strengthened through more effective organization of community events and self-help groups for the low-income to integrate themselves within the larger community. Lastly, collaboration between all community stakeholders is necessary in order for the above solutions to work. With time and effort, we are hopeful that the old kampung spirit within neighborhoods can be reignited.

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Appendix B: Additional Information on Stakeholders

Family Service Centers

Family Service Centers (FSCs) are based in HDB towns to provide help and support to individuals and families in need. Staffed by social service professionals, the FSCs help their beneficiaries to better cope with their personal, social and emotional challenges in their lives through providing services such as counseling, community work and referral services.

There are currently 47 FSCs operated by Voluntary Welfare Organizations around Singapore. These FSCs are supported by government agencies such as the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) and the Singapore Totalisator Board.

Source: <https://www.msf.gov.sg/policies/Strong-and-Stable-Families/Supporting-Families/Pages/Family-Service-Centres.aspx>

Residents' Committees

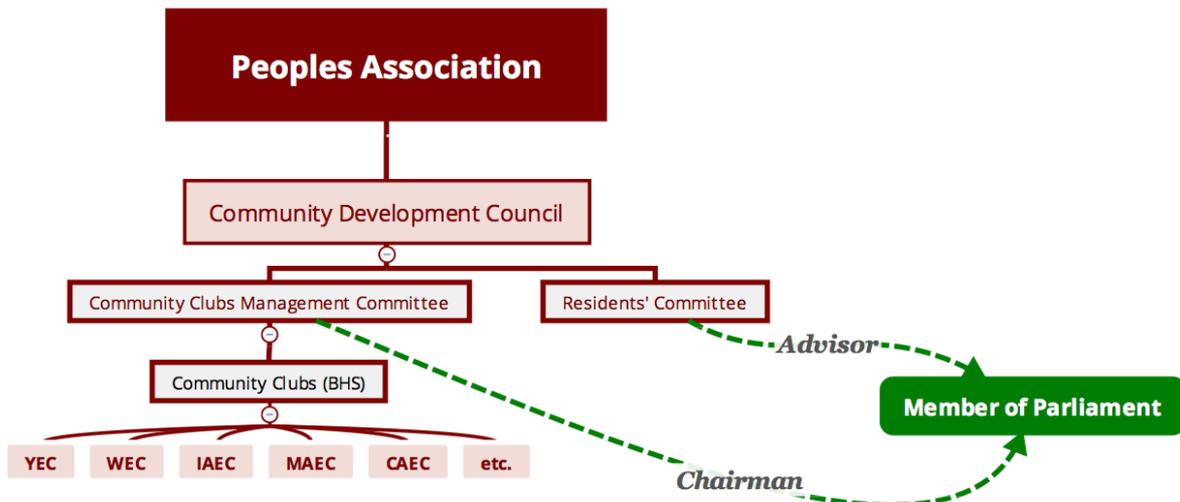
Introduced in 1978, the Residents' Committee (RC) is a grassroots organization set up to promote neighborliness, racial harmony and community cohesiveness amongst residents within their respective RC zones in Housing and Development Board estates. Other functions include liaising with and making recommendations to government authorities on the needs and aspirations of residents, disseminating information and gathering feedback on government policies and actions from residents and promoting good citizenship amongst residents.

Members of the RCs are residents who either volunteer or are nominated by other residents under the Residents Nomination Scheme. As part of the application process, one also needs to receive endorsement from two other non-family residents. Because the RC falls under the ambit of the People's Association, a statutory board in Singapore, it is directly associated with the Government.

Source: https://www.pa.gov.sg/Our_Network/Grassroots_Organisations/Residents_Committees

Typical Interactions in a Community Club/Residents' Committee

The heavy influence of the MPs on the direction of community initiatives can be seen in the below chart, encompassing an advisory role for RCs in addition to chairing the Community Clubs Management Committee in the neighborhood.



Source: Interview with RC representative

Appendix C: List of Interview Questions

These were the interview questions prepared for the BHS residents. However, they served more as guiding questions than questions that had to be strictly followed. Only “compulsory” questions were asked based on how they were crafted. ***Italicized words in grey are guiding words for the interviewer.***

No.	Type	Questions
PART A: Interviewee's general feelings about the BHS neighborhood and his perception about the current community networks		
1	Open ended	When you hear the word community, which words do you think best describe it?
2	Compulsory	Who do you consider to be part of the community you've just described?
		Family
		School <i>(schoolmates, teachers)</i>
		Neighbourhood <i>(everything surrounding where I live)</i>
		Online/ virtual world <i>(Online friends, gaming friends, social groups etc)</i>
		Places of religion <i>(temples, churches, mosques etc)</i>
		Outside school interest groups <i>(includes independent soccer clubs, public running groups etc)</i>
		Workplace
		Other
3	Compulsory	What feelings do you have towards this community?
		Positive
		Negative
		Neutral
4	Open ended	Describe the feeling you have for your community right now - why? <i>Sense of belonging, full of love, inclusive, competitive, disrespectful, helpful</i>
5	Quantitative	Generally how many people you feel close to? <i>(Get the number)</i>
6	Open ended	Who are you very close to in this neighbourhood? (Get names) Do you talk to them often? <i>How often? What do you guys talk about? Where do you guys usually hang out?</i>
7	Quantitative	Generally how many people do you know in this neighbourhood? <i>(Get the number)</i>
8	Open ended	Ask who you think you will say “hi” to amongst the neighbours if possible. <i>(Get the names)</i>
9	Open ended	Where do you usually hang out with your friends/acquaintances in the neighbourhood?
10	Open ended	Do you think it is easy to find a space to hang out? Do you think you can use public spaces freely in Singapore?
11	Open ended	So if you see one of your friends having some troubles at home, or their kids having trouble at school or in their lives what would you do? <i>(guiding questions: Would you involve Beyond? Talk to them yourself? What if they are breaking the law?)</i>
12	Open ended	If you see your neighbours quarreling at the void deck, what would you do? <i>(guiding questions: Talk to them or try to calm the situation down? Alert other people?)</i>
13	Open ended	If you see your neighbors needing help, for example they are carrying heavy stuff along the corridor would you help? <i>If they asked for your help?</i>
14	Open ended	What do you think are some problems your neighbourhood faces? What are you unhappy about with your neighbourhood? <i>What can you do to help to solve them?</i>

PART B: Interviewee's understanding of the community building activities ongoing in BHS

- 15 **Open ended** **What kind of community building activities are happening in your neighbourhood?**
(Try to get a exhaustive list they remember from the past year) Who organises them? Where do they organise them?
- 16 **Open ended** **Do you know their intention behind these activities? Why do you think they organize these activities?**

PART C: Interviewee's perception of his/her own role in community building

- 17 **Open ended** **Have you been involved in any community building efforts in this neighbourhood?**
(Ask about beyond, after RC/CC committee or any groups they have formed on their own) How involved were you? Keep as open-ended question, use options as guidance for level of involvement.
- 18 **Compulsory** **If you were involved, what role did you play?**
I've been part of the main/central organising committee in some community events.
I've been a member of an organising committee in some community events.
I was a volunteer in some community events.
I was an attendee in some community events.
Other
No
- 19 **Quantitative** **How many community events were you involved in?**
(Get the number)
- 20 **Open ended** **What do think is your role in community building? Would you want to contribute to your neighbourhood community more?**
Can you think of other ways you want to contribute to your neighbourhood community?
- 21 **Open ended** **If you don't see a need to be in involved in your neighbourhood community, why?**

PART D: Interviewee's perception of BSS's role in community building

- 22 **Open ended** **What comes to your mind when you think of BSS?**
How involved were you? Keep as open-ended question, use options as guidance for level of involvement.
- 23 **Compulsory** **Do you generally like to attend BSS's activities?**
- a **Compulsory** **Have you attended any BSS activities?**
Yes
No
- b **Compulsory** **Was you experience with BSS activities positive?**
Yes
No
Neutral (I don't feel anything)
- c **Compulsory** **Would you recommend BSS activities to your friends? Mark only one option**
Yes
No
Neutral
Not Aware
- 24 **Open ended** **Why you didn't attend any BSS activities?**
Keep as open ended question, Activities are boring, unclear objectives, poor execution, unfriendly participants, no time, no benefits, unattractive gifts, activities are fake/ forced, too busy, not used to participating in such activities, family don't allow
- 25 **Open ended** **If yes, how was the experience?**
Made more friends, experience was socially meaningful, learnt new skills, broaden perspectives, get free gifts, like social workers, became closer to others
- 26 **Open ended** **If you had a bad experience or neutral experience why?**
- 27 **Open ended** **Why do you think BSS is involved in organising events for the community? What do you think is their objective?**
- 28 **Open ended** **Do you think this objective is met? What are some areas which BSS can improve on?**
- 29 **Open ended** **What are the types of events you wish BSS should organise, and why?**
- 30 **Compulsory** **Would you recommend BSS activities to your friends? Mark only one option**
Yes
No
Neutral
Not Aware

PART E: Interviewee's perception of the Government's role in community building, particularly through RCs and Community Clubs	
31 Compulsory	Have you attended any RC/CC activities? Yes No
32 Compulsory	Was your experience with RC/CC activities positive? Yes No Neutral (I don't feel anything)
33 Compulsory	Would you recommend RC/CC activities to your friends? Mark only one option Yes No Neutral Not Aware
34 Open ended	Why didn't you attend any RC/CC activities? <i>Keep as open ended question, Activities are boring, unclear objectives, poor execution, unfriendly participants, no time, no benefits, unattractive gifts, activities are fake/ forced, too busy, not used to participating in such activities, family don't allow</i>
35 Open ended	If yes, how was the experience? <i>Made more friends, experience was socially meaningful, learnt new skills, broaden perspectives, get free gifts, like social workers, became closer to others</i>
36 Open ended	If you had a bad experience or neutral experience why?
37 Open ended	What are the types of events you wish the govt should organise, and why?

PART F: Interviewee's perception of relative stakeholder's role (including his/her own) in community building	
38 Compulsory	Who do you think is most involved in community building <u>now</u>? Rank the groups. Mark only one option Beyond Social Services (BSS) Government (includes community clubs, residents' committee) Me and my group of friends/neighbours Other
39 Compulsory	Who do you think should be most involved in community building <u>in the future</u>? Rank the groups. Mark only one option Beyond Social Services (BSS) Government (includes community clubs, residents' committee) Me and my group of friends/neighbours Other

Profiling	
Name	Income range
Gender	Household size
Age	Marital status
Children education situation	What are your interests and hobby?
Do you have income and or employment stability	How is your relationship with your family?

Appendix D: Pictorial Illustrations of Usable Spaces

Photos of South Central Community Family Service Center

Photo 1: An open concept used in the FSC's physical layout

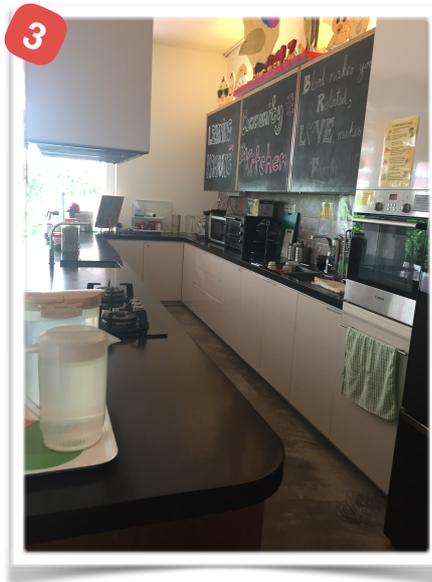


Photo 2: Counseling rooms that is readily available for residents to use for their discussions

Source: <http://www.sccfsc.sg/our-open-community/a-common-space/>

Photo 3: Community Kitchen

Photo 4: Goodwill Store where residents can freely donate and receive items such as clothes,



furniture and stationery

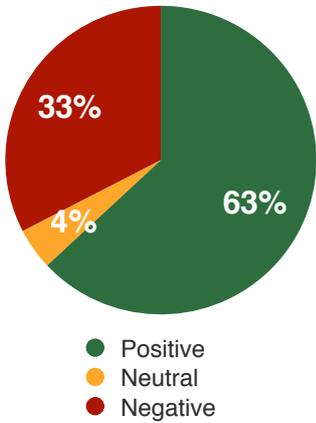
Source: taken by authors during site visit to the SCCFSC.

Appendix E: Summary Table of Solutions

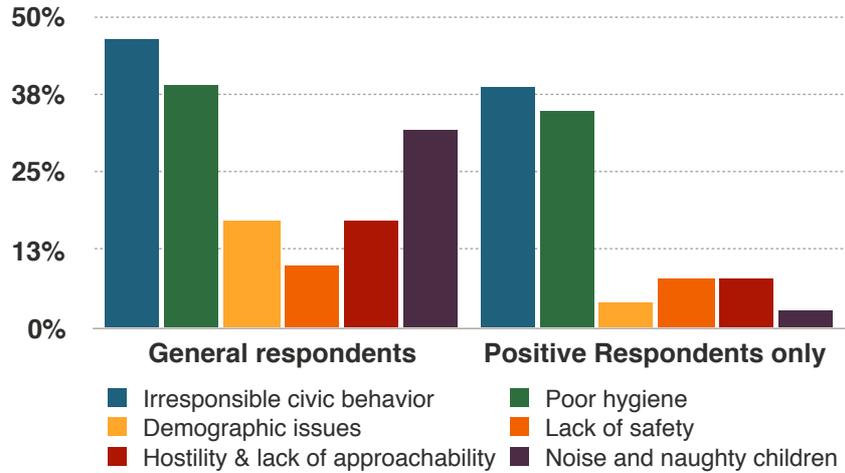
Principles	Solutions	Issues Addressed	Advantages	Potential Challenges
Creating an enabling environment for self-empowerment of individuals	A one-stop online community portal for crowdsourcing, community interaction and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limitations of top-down approaches in meeting diverse needs of residents Low community participation and interaction Over-dependency on Government funding for community building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps address diverse needs of residents Strengthens interactions and mutual support among all residents Serves as an additional community building platform that encourages resource sharing and help among residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Portal may exclude people who are less technologically savvy
Foster greater collaboration between FSC, RC and CC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shift Government leaders' mindset to facilitate cooperation Establish better engagement protocols between organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mistrust among organizations Reduces duplicative efforts in community building Lack of interaction across various subgroups Resource constraints faced by some organizations (e.g. VWOs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduces mistrust and establish understanding among the organizations Encourages greater community outreach More efficient use of community building resources Encourages overlapping of subgroups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attitudinal change requires time Collaboration could increase bureaucracy The need to manage multiple stakeholders may hamper the speed which community events are executed
Increasing interaction platforms	Revamping public spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents' time constraint issues Lack of subgroup overlap Some residents lack awareness in community building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caters to residents' different needs more flexibly Provide more chances for different subgroups to interact Could be used to encourage residents to share resources with one another 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revamping public spaces may require substantial manpower and infrastructure cost
Improving effectiveness of community events	Adopting interaction promoting strategies in community events, such as ice breaker games	Community events failing to adequately encourage repeated interaction among participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help facilitates stronger friendships that can sustain beyond the community event Stronger friendships may subsequently encourage residents to play a more active role in the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some residents may not be willing to expand their social networks Organizers may ultimately fail to encourage interaction despite using interaction promoting strategies
Empowering needs of low income families	Establish self-help groups within low-income families	Lack of psychological support of low-income	Stronger social support network among low income people	Some low-income residents may not be willing to participate

Appendix F: Additional Charts

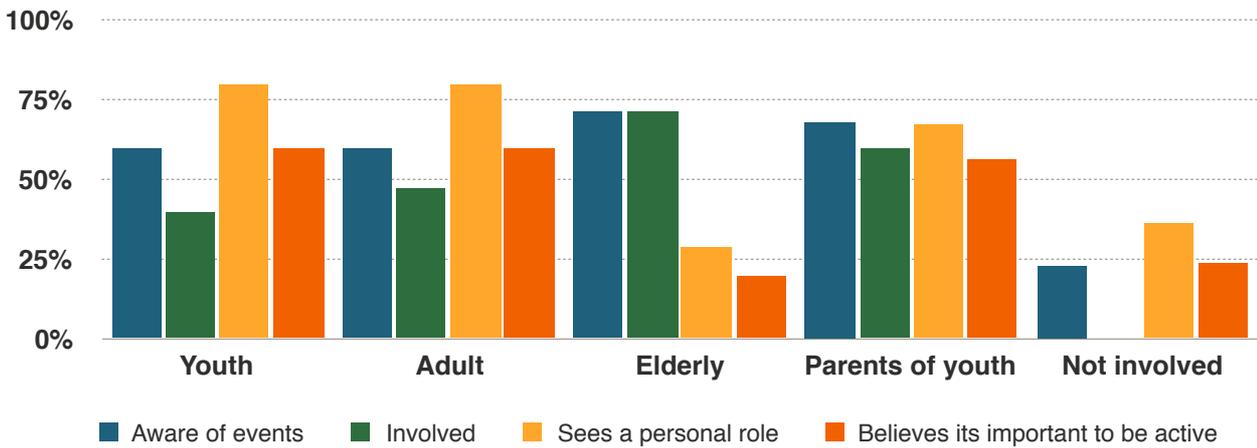
Feelings toward community



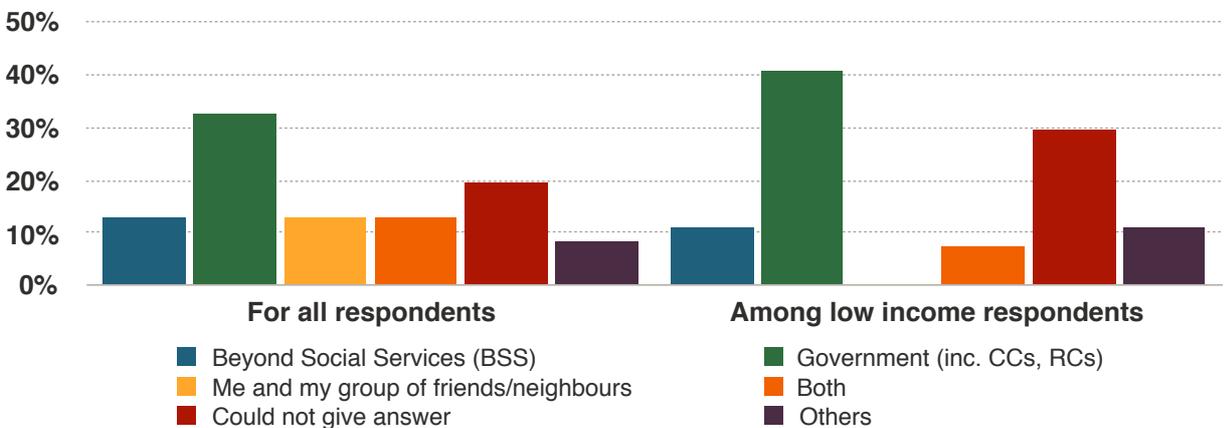
Identified issues in the neighborhood



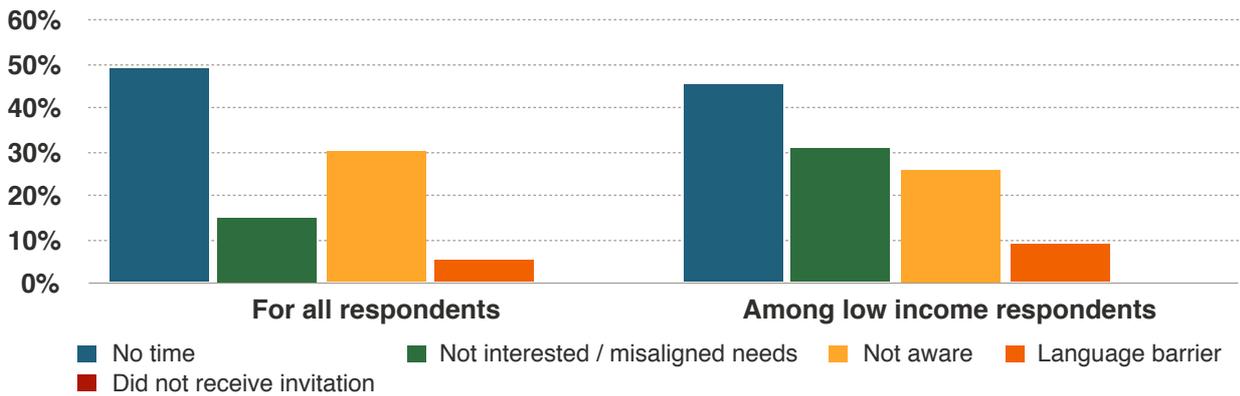
Responses about community building involvement, % of each respondent group



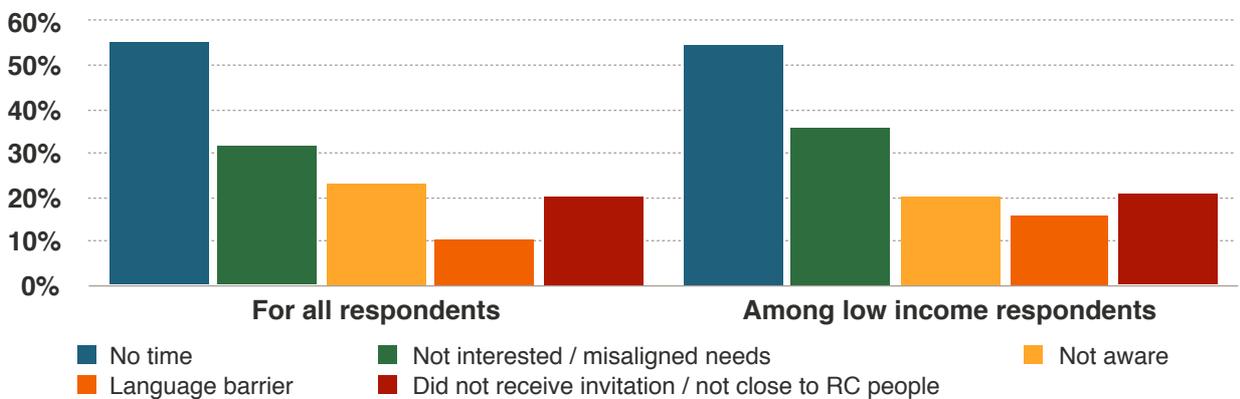
Perception of who should be most involved in community building in the future



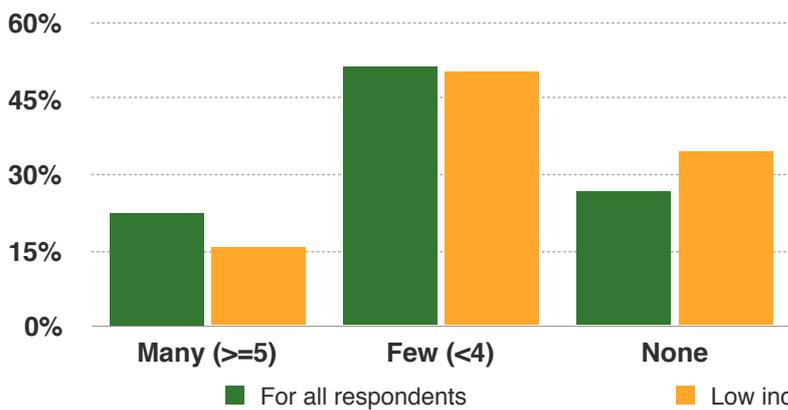
Stated reasons for not attending BSS activities



Stated reasons for not attending RC/CC activities



% of respondents identifying the number of acquaintances, by group



Identifying acquaintances

