Nurturing Villages & Safeguarding Communities

A Case Study of Beyond Social Services

Justin Lee, Andrew Lim, Sim Jui Liang, Shamil Zainuddin and Dhevarajan s/o Devadas
Institute of Policy Studies
Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy
National University of Singapore

&

Hana Alhadad
Singapore University of Social Sciences

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Abstract

Beyond Social Services is one of the few organisations in Singapore that utilises an asset-based community development approach to equip disadvantaged families to solve their own problems. This approach recognises the strengths inherent in communities, and that people are the experts of their own lives — in contrast to a deficiency approach where an expert provides a service to solve problems for clients.

To do this work well, community workers have to build trust through long-term relationships. Only when you are embedded and become part of the community can you begin the task of safeguarding the interests of the community — sometimes against formal social services, organisational self-interests, and even the community's own instincts. This requires constant self-reflection and being comfortable with uncertainty, because communities constantly evolve, as do the partners who want to help.

This case study shows that community work cannot be scaled via replication the same way services can, because of the need to adapt to local relationships and circumstances. Instead, community development work should be anchored by a vision of what a good community is, and an ethos that demands embracing doubt and constant self-reflection. What is relevant and meaningful will ultimately depend on the community itself.

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

1) This is a case study of a non-profit community organisation, Beyond Social Services ("Beyond"), focusing on how it engages in asset-based community development in Singapore.

2) A historical and literature review was conducted, followed by in-depth interviews with members of the board, management and staff to get an inside perspective of the organisation. A theory of change exercise was also conducted to help articulate and understand key organisational strategies.

3) The research is motivated by two main questions:

   a) What is the logic and value of asset-based approach to community development? How can community workers generate participation and build strong communities in low-income neighbourhoods?

   b) What is the role of a community organisation, given the availability of professional social services, ample community infrastructure and the ease at which people can form and convene groups in Singapore society?

Background: Community Development in Singapore

4) **There is ample infrastructure for community activities and abundant community-based services**. As a statutory board, the People's Association (PA) promotes racial harmony and social cohesion in Singapore. It allocates resources to needy members of the community, maintains communal spaces and organises activities for local residents, and acts as a conduit for the government to receive feedback from residents. At the same time, costs of forming groups and starting initiatives are low; social media and internet technologies have allowed people to convene and form interest-based groups at little or no cost, and there is a wide array of ground-up initiatives and mini social movements with little formal support or funding.

5) **What then is the role of community organisations like Beyond Social Services?** Beyond is unique in three ways:

   a) While it is engaged in community development, it is focused only on poor or disadvantaged communities, which is different from the broader mandate of the PA.

   b) Unlike community-based services, Beyond's approach strives to help communities come together to make their own decisions about how to resolve issues that affect them.

   c) Distinct from many informal ground-up initiatives, Beyond has a relatively long view of its work — they aspire to follow through with a child until they are 25 years old.

Beyond Social Services in Focus

6) **Beyond Social Services is a non-profit organisation that takes an asset-based approach to working with low-income communities in Singapore.** It aims to provide opportunities for children and youth from disadvantaged backgrounds to avoid a life of

delinquency and break free from poverty. To do so requires working with their families, who are embedded in their local communities, which in turn are situated within larger social structures. Taking a community development approach, Beyond acts as a conduit to external resources and support, and a focal point for community dialogue. In their own words, because it takes a village to raise a child, Beyond is "an organisation that nurtures villages."

7) **Key organisational milestones**: Started in 1969 in Bukit Ho Swee, the organisation has run various government-initiated pilot programmes for youth-at-risk, and also operated government-funded services such as two residential homes and a Family Service Centre (FSC). It gradually moved away from remedial services towards preventive and upstream work, and adopted "Beyond Social Services" as a new name to communicate their ethos of nurturing and empowering communities to solve social problems.

8) This meant hiving off previous programmes in order to stay focused, including the FSC (now South Central Community Family Service Centre), a teenage pregnancy crisis support programme (now Babes Pregnancy Crisis Support), and a programme for teenage girls in challenging circumstances (now Beautiful People) — all of which have become independent charities.

9) In 2015, a key funder withdrew, which led to a painful restructuring process where staff had to be let go for cost containment. A new board was formed that made fundraising their main priority; this has resulted in a financial position that is more sound, but with strict limits to growth based on projected resources.

10) **Main programmes**. *Youth United* is Beyond's main programme, whose purpose is to provide a nurturing environment to fend off delinquency and potentially harmful behaviours, by facilitating the community to contribute positively to the lives of youths in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. *Healthy Start Child Development Centre* is a childcare centre that accepts only children from families in rental housing and actively tries to involve parents and caregivers. It maintains a low student-teacher ratio at affordable prices to ensure that children gain access to quality pre-school education that they might otherwise forgo. Both Youth United and Healthy Start act as platforms for multiple diverse programmes. For example, a volunteer runs a fitness and sports programme with children from the neighbourhoods every week, and a savings programme has been started in the childcare centre.

11) **Organisational structure**. Based on its key programmes, staff are distributed between a community workers team that interfaces directly with members of the community, and a partnership team who will engage stakeholders like schools, civil society organisations, informal groups and corporate sponsors who wish to provide gifts, resources or volunteers for various activities in the neighbourhoods.

12) Leadership responsibilities for community work are distributed to staff who are part of "locality teams" that work in particular neighbourhoods, who will also simultaneously have functional responsibilities in "objective teams" that may focus on issues such as learning or employment. Like other small civil society organisations, roles like advocacy, research and communications are taken on by more senior staff who also have multiple responsibilities.

13) **Key thrusts**. Beyond has three strategic thrusts:

    a) Give *children and youth* an opportunity to refuse a life of delinquency and welfare dependency. This is based on long-term engagement with the youth, i.e., keeping in touch with them until they are 25 years old.

    b) Help *families* determine how they want to achieve stability and resilience. (Key to this process are family conferences so that they can resolve their own challenges.)

    c) Nurture competent *communities* so that neighbourhoods are safe and mutually supportive. (Part of this requires nurturing local leadership so that there are community-led efforts to care for their vulnerable members.)

14) **Organisational priorities.** Recently, Beyond has invested in a client relationship management system that allows them to track and better appreciate the changing characteristics of the communities they work with, as well as their own volunteers. It has also reached out to sponsors to educate them on how best they can help in empowering the community to take action and discuss issues that matter, as opposed to providing gifts.

15) **Future plans**. Going forward, Beyond would like to: 1) Nurture local leadership and encouraging communities to define, own and act on common issues; 2) create meaningful cooperation between local and external volunteers, so that there are more interdependent relationships that cut across class, ethnic and other lines; 3) help members of the community tell their own stories and advocate for themselves; and 4) professionalise fundraising by hiring a specialist to do this job, and in close collaboration with community workers who currently do this as part of their work.

The Logic and Value of Asset-Based Community Development

16) Beyond adopts a **strengths-based** or **asset-based** community development (ABCD) approach, which means regarding people as experts of their own lives, compared to a deficit approach that focuses on their needs more typical of social service provision, where professionals and experts create and deliver solutions to meet the needs of clients.

17) The key difference is not whether the work is done *in* the community (since there are many community-based services) but whether it is done *with* and *by* the community, i.e., members of the community come together to take ownership of their own issues and make decisions for themselves. The goal is to develop community response to local issues, which can often be simple and powerful compared to formal services. Doing this work also requires one to hone a vision of community — good communities have solidarity with others, agency, and are inclusive and hospitable to others.

18) Concretely, this philosophy and approach translates to **materially different ways of dealing with problems**. For example, a mother who has schizophrenia may not be able to care for or send her children to school. If someone alerts the authorities, she may be institutionalised and have her children taken away by Child Protection Services. However, all it may take is for her neighbours to help send and pick the children up from school, especially when their own children go to the same school. They can also support her by checking in on her, bringing her food, but importantly, holding her *accountable* to her own recovery in ways that a clinical approach will not allow. This is possible when decision-

making processes are given back to the family and extended to the wider, neighbourly circle of support.

19) The value of such an approach is that it can be meaningfully **preventive and upstream,** and where possible, seeks out communal-wide or systemic change. It can prevent unnecessary state intervention when families or the community can be mobilised to help in a safe manner. It is also often deeply transformative to those who adopt such an approach to interact with the members of the community, where there is deep satisfaction at being able to empower communities than to inadvertently push them into dependence on formal services. This approach does not undermine the relevance of social services, which is often needed, but raises the question of whether and under what conditions informal support may be more adequate.

The Role of an Embedded Community Organisation

20) From Beyond's experience, these are some general conditions for doing community work:

   a) **Be embedded in the community, so that you are part of the community**. In investing extensive time in the community, members will learn to develop deep relationships and trust that will allow you to understand their needs and strengths. Community workers see personal relationships as central to their work, and therefore may accept invitations to weddings and graduation ceremonies. While less common for social workers or case workers who might maintain greater professional distance, Beyond regards this as a means to recognise the hospitality and contributions of members, and to challenge the perception of community members as beneficiaries dependent on charity.

   b) **Create the conditions for strong community**. This involves *forming* the community and *empowering* it. Forming the community means bringing members together to get to know one another, and finding out each other's concerns, issues and aspirations, then giving them opportunities to step forward and be involved. Community empowerment means facilitating their power to act and removing barriers to community action; a community that has strong intention and will but no power is not a strong community.

   c) **Appreciating the logic and rhythms of the community**. Compared to formal, organisational life, community exists through people's everyday experiences and is relatively egalitarian and fluid. This means recognising that: 1) Community initiatives necessarily come and go with changes in communal issues and desires; 2) individualistic transactional relationships define much of Singaporean living, but are antithetical to community-building, which focuses instead on how needs and objectives can be met together with one another; and 3) members can have different priorities, interests and willingness to participate in community activities, which must be respected. Sometimes, little spots of activity matter more than a spectacular show of togetherness.

21) Beyond has taken on the role of **safeguarding the community**, and regard it as an almost sacred duty that should be done with the highest regard, care and constant reflexivity. The organisation and its leaders are fully aware of the imbalance of power between organisations, including their own, and members of disadvantaged communities, and take

great pains to behave as a conduit for communal interests rather than their own. Concretely, this translates to behaviour that protects the dignity and agency of the community even at Beyond's own expense. For example, while "sob stories" about the lives of clients are one way of raising funds in many charities, Beyond ensures that they do not exploit members of the community that way.

22) **Safeguarding the community means striking an often uncertain balance between neutrality and being prescriptive.** Beyond sees itself as a neutral conduit for whatever the community is interested in, although it sometimes takes a prescriptive approach to guide them towards positive behaviour that expresses the values of hospitality and inclusion. There is therefore a commitment to be comfortable with ambiguity, and to be in constant doubt about whether everything is done in the community's interest. For instance, Beyond started a difficult internal conversation about whether distributing corporate gifts to the community actually helps or weakens the community in the long term.

23) **Adopting a culture of community in the organisational culture of Beyond**. Leaders maintain a reflexive stance that permeates through the organisation; KPIs are necessarily looser in order for meaningful work to flourish. However, leaders are sometimes misunderstood within the organisation as being unclear or lacking direction because of their insistence on constant reflection and uncertainty, which is necessary to safeguard the community. Instead, they see the need to hold the space for dialogue instead of making premature decisions to set directions for everyone to go along with. Individual staff with good ideas and initiatives have to earn the mandate of the whole organisation by persuading everyone, and this can be frustrating from an efficiency point of view. However, the payoff is that staff have the space to deliberate carefully as a community and move together as an organisation.

24) In going against the grain of mainstream social service provision, Beyond expectedly encounters many challenges. This includes having to contest the entrenched charity mindset among stakeholders, finding innovative ways to measure the success of its community development work, and trying to avoid being seen as competitors by social service and grassroots agencies — all these in a context where communities themselves may not have the competence or will to act collectively in its interests.

Introduction

> Community is not one of those things that we have to "do". Community is like a forest — you don't plant a forest. You safeguard it, and the forest grows on its own. You [have to] cultivate, protect, and safeguard the space.
>
> Beyond staff

This is a case study to document and understand how a non-profit organisation, Beyond Social Services ("Beyond"), has engaged in asset-based community development in Singapore. The research will highlight challenges faced and adaptive strategies adopted in areas such as community work, asset-based community development, driving community participation, as well as stakeholder engagement.

It is motivated by the following questions:

1) What is the logic and value of asset-based approach to community development? How can community workers generate participation and build strong communities in low-income neighbourhoods?

2) What is the role of a community organisation, given the availability of professional social services, ample community infrastructure and the ease at which people can form and convene groups in Singapore society?

Significance

First and foremost, this report would be useful for those interested in community engagement and development in specific context in Singapore. This case study will introduce Beyond's approach to doing asset-based community development, a relatively uncommon model in Singapore, and the ethos and principles guiding the approach.

In particular, organisations interested in asset-based community development will better understand the capabilities and unique skill sets required to do such work, and how to customise best practices for the local community, especially when communities engaged are highly diverse in terms of ethnicity, language, values, norms and socio-economic background.

They would also be better able to appreciate how to navigate the local policy context, seek out relevant community assets, work with government agencies and manage a wide diversity of stakeholders in order for community development to be empowering and successful. The case study also aims to reflect on the measurement of outcomes, and provoke reflection on what counts as success, given that Beyond's work in community development appears to be different from the usual pilot-then-scale-up model of replicating successful social services.

At a broader level, this case contributes to a more thoughtful understanding of how to build strong and self-reliant communities that are capable of mutual help and support. It also hopes to build an appreciation of the social change potential of voluntary efforts in community development and engagement in Singapore from the ground up.

Approach

Unlike case studies research that is used by social scientists for theoretical refinement, explication of context-dependent processes, etc., this case study is written more for the purpose of teaching. Yin makes this distinction, noting that materials in teaching cases may be adjusted to emphasise certain points with more effect, whereas all evidence in case studies research should be presented fairly (Yin, 2014). An overview of Singapore's community development landscape is relevant for public policy students, while the case writing on Beyond is relevant for students of non-profit management and leadership.[1]

For this case study, we conducted research in two key stages:

1) **Literature review and local scan.** We conducted this review for a general understanding of the context of community development in Singapore. This included understanding various ground-up initiatives from informal groups and also the work of People's Association (PA), a unique statutory body with a wide mandate to oversee grassroots organisations, community development councils and community centres.

2) **Primary data collection**. We conducted interviews with three board-level members of Beyond, six members of Beyond's management and staff, two volunteers as well as two members of the community — all of whom had been associated with the organisation for at least two years. We also gathered data based on publicly available information.

    a) **Interviews**. We engaged in a broad conversation about general issues such as organisational challenges faced and adaptive strategies in areas such as: programme delivery, research and advocacy, volunteer management, corporate partnerships and government relations. We then allowed themes to emerge based on this preliminary exploration, then delved deeper into issues that had broader strategic significance or where the organisation found pressing or relevant.

    b) **Theory of change exercise to capture organisational strategy.** Besides the interviews, we also adopted a theory of change (TOC) framework to help articulate and capture Beyond's organisational strategy succinctly. Just as a picture paints a thousand words, this visual diagram helps provide a strategic overview of what programmes they run, how they add up to key strategic thrusts, and how those are supposed to achieve their desired social impact.

    The Beyond team participated in a TOC workshop that one of the principal investigators facilitated, in order to articulate and evaluate Beyond organisational strategy in terms of its logical flow; achievability of organisational ambitions; tightness of connection between activities and outcomes; and alignment of activities with available resources.

    See Annex C for Beyond's Theory of Change.

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[1] See Libby & Deitrick (2016) for case examples in non-profit management.

Background

What is Community Development?

Community development is part of a broader democratic process where the community comes together to take collective action to determine its own needs and how they should be met (Ife, 2016; Ledwith, 2016). According to Bhattacharyya (2004), the purpose of community development is to create solidarity and agency. Solidarity refers to having a shared identity, whether from sharing a common place, ideology or interest, as well as common norms or a code of conduct that, when broken, affects members emotionally and in other ways. Agency means that people have the human autonomy and capacity to order their world, to live and act in accordance with their own meaning systems, and the ability to define themselves as opposed to being defined by others.

Achieving these twin goals means being guided by three principles: encouraging self-help; attending to subjectively felt needs; and supporting participation. Self-help entails mobilising indigenous assets in the community as well as avoiding dependency, while focusing on felt needs means that project must respond to human needs and variation as against totalising developmental impositions. Supporting participation means supporting people to take part in the production of collective meanings, and being included in debate and decision-making processes.

Community development is often informed by the principles of social and environmental justice, Ledwith (2016) describes community development as rooted in the vision of a far, just and sustainable world (p.5). Its core values are empowerment, co-operation and collective learning, espousing the ideology of equality including respect, dignity, trust, mutuality and reciprocity (Ledwith, 2016).

While there is no consistency in the usage of terms like 'community work', 'community organising' and 'community development', it is useful to consider that work with communities can fall along a spectrum of how much solidarity and agency is emphasised. On one end are community-based services no different from professional social services where an intervention is provided by an expert to a target client group in order to address their problems. On the other end is where the community comes together to define their own problems and implement their own solutions, with the help of a community worker or facilitator. Some find that such a distinction is important enough and prescribe specific terms to indicate such a difference.

For example, the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2019) defines 'community work' to include situations where the issues or problems in the community are defined by external parties, while in 'community development', groups and members in the community are supported to identify issues, problems or concerns that affect them.

For the purpose of this report, there is no need to adopt any specific terminology strictly, except to acknowledge the usefulness of such analytic distinctions.

What is Asset-Based Community Development?

The asset-based community development (ABCD) approach builds on the principles and ideologies of community development and uncovers the community's assets. It focuses on the strengths and potentials in a community, identifying its resources and mobilising individuals,

groups, associations, organisations, and institutions to come together for the betterment of the community. Pioneered in the early 1990s, the focus of ABCD was to empower communities to identify and address their own issues, problems and concerns through the local assets available to them (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996).

It can be understood as an approach to, or a strategy for, community development, as a set of methods for community organisation or mobilisation (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). The ABCD approach encourages the community to use their own assets and resources as the basis for development, and the methods promote the people in the community to focus on what they already possess and leverage existing and potential strengths (Mathie, Cameron & Gibson, 2017).

Rowland (2008) identifies five key assets in ABCD:

1) **Individuals** refer to the people of the community, where each person is recognised as having assets or gifts waiting to be uncovered.

2) **Associations** are small groups of people, formal and informal societies or clubs coming together around a common interest, critical to community mobilisation.

3) **Institutions** help establish a sense of civic responsibility in the community, and include local government agencies (such as the Social Service Offices or the People's Association), schools, clinics and private businesses.

4) **Physical assets** are land, buildings, space in the community that can be used.

5) **Connections** are exchanges between people or other assets, which include community connectors — people who enjoy meeting people, developing relationships and inviting and connecting members of the community. Community connectors identify individuals' potentials and ways to nurture and share them (McKnight, 2013).

Social connections and relationships are central to the principles that guide ABCD, which recognises that each person in the community has something to contribute, and that they must be connected in order for sustainable development to take place. Community members should be viewed as active citizens rather than passive recipients of the services provided by institutions, which are regarded as limited in their ability to solve community problems. Rather, community development is strongest when it involves a broad base of community action.

Another principle that guides the ABCD approach is to challenge the notion of passivity amongst citizens by listening to the interests of the people in the community, asking them for ideas to the problems, issues or concerns that they have identified and making decisions collectively. This relates to the sustainable development of solutions in the community, by the community promoting active citizenry. In practice, this involves institutional leaders creating opportunities for and supporting stronger community involvement in community problems, and then taking a step back to facilitate the process, empowering community members to take control (Rowland, 2008).

The Landscape of Community Development in Singapore

Community development in Singapore is based around a planned, service-delivery and consensus model. (Ng, 2017). State-led community development — through the People's Association and the Community Development Councils — has dominated the style of community work in Singapore.

The People's Association (PA) was set up in 1960 to consolidate a fragmented and politicised community sector and provide better equipment and services to communities. It is a unique statutory body with a wide mandate to oversee grassroots organisations, community development councils and community centres. Voluntary efforts at community work will typically have to either work within the PA system or find a niche outside them. They later branched out to support childcare (PA kindergartens), youth leadership training (National Youth Leadership Training Institute, Outward Bound School), cultivating a sporting culture (pugilistic displays, sports competitions) and assisting in initiatives to build a resilient and hardworking society (rugged society, National Day Parade) in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Goodwill Committees, Citizens' Consultative Committees (CCC) and Residents' Committees (RC) were later set up, in 1964, 1965 and 1978, respectively, to act as a bridge between community leaders and the national leadership, in order to communicate policies and to convey feedback from the ground. The RCs in particular, provide a conduit for social interaction and support networks to form amidst the isolative effects of urban life. It also provides a platform to nurture younger neighbourhood leaders to solve social problems and act as intermediaries between government bureaucracies and residents (Vasoo, 2001).

In 1997, the Community Development Councils were formed to strengthen bonding and promote cohesion within local communities and to improve efficiency and coordination in public assistance schemes as well as the CCCs, RCs as well as various NGOs, in community problem-solving (Vasoo, 2001).

There are very few voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that engage in community development as has been defined. Many offer community-based programmes, choosing instead to focus on the delivery of direct services to tap into available funding.

With the emergence of social media and internet technologies, the costs of forming groups and starting community-based initiatives have been significantly lowered. People are able to convene and form interest-based groups at little or no cost, and there has been a wide array of ground-up initiatives and mini social movements that operate with little formal support or funding. Some examples in this regard are Meetup, which organises online groups and in-person events for people with similar interests; OpenJio, an online network of change-makers entirely hosted on Telegram; and the plethora of Facebook, Yahoo and Google groups that facilitate both online and offline social organisation.

Situating Beyond Social Services in this Landscape

> They have a unique model…. [Beyond is] a very different charity organisation. Others [charity organisations] are like Boys' Home, that type of thing. This is going to the family, the community. Almost like the grassroots people but they do it differently. Grassroots is not charity.
>
> Beyond board member

> In social work, I just focus on what is the programme objective, and about whether I am fulfilling the programme objective, kept within the boundaries of the programme.
>
> Beyond staff

Compared to other organisations that do community work or community development, Beyond is unique in three ways:

1) While it is engaged in community development, it is focused only on poor or disadvantaged communities, which is different from the broader mandate of the PA.

2) Unlike community-based services, Beyond's initiatives strive to helping communities come together to make their own decisions about how to resolve issues that affect them. This can be different from current ways of going about social services, which tend to focus on completing programme objectives.

3) Distinct from many informal ground-up initiatives, Beyond has a relatively long view of its work — they aspire to journey together with a child until they are 25 years old.

Beyond Social Services in Focus

> If "it takes a village to raise a child", then who is looking after the village? Our job is to nurture those villages, in public rental housing areas, so that kids have a decent childhood, avoid getting into trouble and ending up in prison….
>
> Gerard Ee, Executive Director of Beyond Social Services

Beyond Social Services is a non-profit organisation that works with low-income neighbourhoods in Singapore. It aims to provide opportunities for children and youth from disadvantaged backgrounds to avoid a life of delinquency and break free from poverty. To do so requires working with the families, who are embedded in their local community, so Beyond adopts a community development approach and acts as a focal point for community dialogue. These communities are themselves situated within larger social structures, so Beyond also acts as a conduit to external resources and support. As the above quote suggests, because it takes a village to raise a child, Beyond is an organisation that nurtures villages.

Started in 1969 in Bukit Ho Swee, the organisation has run various government-initiated pilot programmes for youth-at-risk and also operated government-funded services such as a residential home for vulnerable children and a Family Service Centre (FSC). Along the way, the organisation has gradually moved away from remedial towards preventive and more upstream work. When it started to venture outside of Bukit Ho Swee after 30 years of experience, it also adopted a new name "Beyond Social Services" to communicate their ethos.

The organisation has been determined to stay true to their calling of nurturing and empowering communities, and has also hived off the abovementioned FSC (now known as South Central Community FSC) and its teenage pregnancy programme (now a formal entity known as Babes Pregnancy Crisis Support) in order to stay focused on community development.

After a key funder pulled out in 2015, Beyond underwent a painful restructuring process where staff had to be let go for cost containment. A new board was then formed that made fundraising their main priority, and while this has improved Beyond's financial position, it has created strict limits to growth based on projected resources.

This section provides a deeper understanding of Beyond and its inner workings, from its programmes and institutional structure to its organisational strategies and history.[2]

Main Programmes

Youth United. Youth United is Beyond's main programme, and its purpose is to provide a nurturing environment to fend off delinquency and potentially harmful behaviours by facilitating the community to contribute positively to the lives of youths in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Beyond's staff is distributed between a team of community workers that work directly with

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[2] See Annex B for a comprehensive history of Beyond and its milestones.

members of the community, and a partnership team who engages stakeholders, corporates and sponsors:

- **Community workers** operate in locale-based teams in areas such as Bukit Ho Swee, Bukit Merah and Ang Mo Kio. They interact directly with members of the community, instilling a spirit of learning and leadership in the youth but also building their families' competence at addressing challenges, and contributing to a restorative neighbourhood that provides a nurturing and positive environment to grow up in.

- The **partnership team** engages organisations such as schools, civil society organisations, informal groups and corporate sponsors who want to provide gifts, resources or volunteers for various activities in the neighbourhoods.

In 2018, Blackbox Research (2018) conducted a study[3] to examine the one-year impact of Beyond's central programme, Youth United, on the communities that they work within and with. The results suggested that for neighbourhoods where Beyond had been present for at least six months, youths improved significantly in their ability to handle conflict and problems at home, and felt more personally empowered. Their parents and other adults in the community also felt that they could better share their concerns with their communities, take control of their problems, and felt safer. This points to the level of impact and success Beyond has had in the communities they work with, despite employing means and methods that seem vastly different to other related mainstream organisations in Singapore.

Healthy Start Child Development Centre. A childcare centre that accepts only children from families in rental housing, actively tries to involve parents and caregivers, and that maintains both a low student-teacher ratio at affordable prices to ensure that these children gain access to quality preschool that they might otherwise forgo.

Both Youth United and Healthy Start act as platforms for multiple diverse programmes. For example, a volunteer runs a fitness and sports programme with children from the neighbourhoods every week, and a savings programme has been started in the childcare centre.

For Beyond, doing community work also means connecting issues faced in the community with broader and more public issues and structures. According to a respondent from Beyond's management, the organisation engages in "quiet advocacy" that is directly linked to their work, providing feedback to government, research and raising public awareness about its ethos.[4]

In terms of organisational priorities, Beyond is constantly thinking about how they can better build the communities in which they work and in recent times, it has focused on these issues:

- **Client Relationship Management (CRM).** Beyond has invested in a CRM system that allows them to better track and appreciate the characteristics of the community, its members, as well as Beyond's own volunteers.

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[3] Link to the study: http://beyondresearch.sg/youth-united-impact-study-beyond-social-services/

[4] A recent example of this is a commentary that was published to *The Straits Times*, which can be read here: http://www.beyond.org.sg/stop-seeing-people-problems-theyre-assets-build-social-capital/

- **Educating sponsors on gifting.** Beyond reflected that it has expended too much manpower and energy on channelling gifts from sponsors to the community. Because they want the community to come together to discuss issues that matter and take collective action, they have decided to cut down on channelling gifts, where possible, by educating their sponsors.

Figure 1. Children attending Healthy Start Child Development Centre, at a cooking session. Photo: Beyond Social Services

Organisational Structure

Given its relatively flat organisational structure, leadership responsibilities for community work are distributed to staff who will be part of "locality teams" that work in particular neighbourhoods, who will also simultaneously have functional responsibilities in "objective teams" that may focus on issues such as learning or employment. Like other small civil society organisations, roles like advocacy, research and communications are taken on by more senior staff who also have multiple responsibilities.

Organisational Strategy and Priorities

[See Annex C – Beyond Social Services' Theory of Change]

Based on the interviews and TOC exercise we conducted with Beyond's management, the organisation possesses three strategic thrusts and priorities (current and future):

1) Give **children and youth** an opportunity to refuse a life of delinquency and welfare dependency. This is based on long-term engagement with the youth (i.e., keeping in touch with them until they are 25 years old)

2) Help **families** determine how they want to achieve stability and resilience (key to this process are family conferences so that they can resolve their own challenges)

3) Nurture competent **communities** so that neighbourhoods are safe and mutually supportive (part of this requires nurturing local leadership so that there are community-led efforts to care for their vulnerable members)

With regard to future plans, here are some explanatory quotes by different respondents to help illustrate Beyond's plans:

- **Nurturing Local Leadership**

  Work that facilitates local leadership. This would mean simply admiring what is already there and making meaning of it to encourage people to own and act on their issues. Research and information gathering should be participant-led, where communities really define the agenda. Staff have to be mindful, honest and transparent about their vested interest. If resources allow, tech platforms [could be explored] within rental blocks to increase neighbour to neighbour contact.[5]

- **Volunteer Development**

  Meaningful cooperation between local and external volunteers. Loose ties established and social networks widened for mutual benefit. More inter-dependency among people and even across class, ethnicity and other lines.

- **Communications**

  Again in the spirit of empowerment, members must tell their own stories and advocate for themselves. Staff may find the resources, connect to other networks and to hold the space or to enable their efforts.

- **Fundraising**

  The Board wants to go the professional way, and has embarked on the search for a fundraiser. At the same time, it sees fundraising as a locality-based as well as a broad-based effort, and is aiming to have microsites that encourage constituents to support work that enhances the lives of their neighbours. The fundraising professional will probably run a parallel fund-raising programme, while community workers must continue to see fundraising as "friend-raising" and do their part.

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[5] A noteworthy example in this regard is nebenan.de, a Berlin-based "social neighbourhood network" which reached one million users in Germany last year. More here: https://www.eu-startups.com/2018/10/good-hood-the-berlin-based-social-neighbourhood-network-nebenan-de-reaches-1-million-users-in-germany/

The Logic and Value of Asset-Based Community Development

If the purpose of community development is to nurture solidarity and agency while being guided by the tenets of self-help, subjective needs and supporting participation (Bhattacharyya, 2004) — as an organisation in the business of community development, how does Beyond measure up to these ideals and principles?

It sees itself as "nurturing villages" to be strong communities, but what does a strong community actually entail? What are the necessary factors needed for organisations like Beyond to effectively build strong communities?

It starts by honing a vision of the good community — one of solidarity, agency, inclusivity and hospitality

To do community development work, one must first set one's sights on the goal, by first articulating what a "good" community means. A simple and relatable way of doing this was described by one respondent, who visualised community as "… like going home. You must feel safe and welcome, comfortable. People know one another. They are willing to step forward and extend a helping hand, willing to speak up when they see an issue."

What might this sentiment mean conceptually? At a forum in 2018, Executive Director of Beyond Gerard Ee discussed five elements of what a community is based on Beyond's work with low-income neighbourhoods[6]:

Community is not just a sense of belonging, but 1) a **way** of belonging that belongs to its members. It is tied to 2) a physical or conceptual **place** that members can call one's own, one that creates 3) an **experience** of connectedness and contentment when members come together around a common purpose or interest, and feel happy and connected.

Community is also 4) a **posture** of caring, where people come together not only to receive support from one another, but to give it as well. Finally, community is 5) a **possibility** that starts with the ownership of two questions:

- What do we want to create together that would make a difference?

- What can we do together that we cannot do alone?

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[6] Details of the forum can be accessed here: https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips/events/details/ips-community-forum-2018-here-comes-everybody-and-all-can-contribute. At the event, he further described three things that a strong community should possess:

1) **Gifts**. Social services tend to view people as having needs to be fulfilled. In contrast, the raw material of a community are gifts — each member is regarded as having something to contribute as well as the desire to contribute.

2) **Association**. Associations are the premise by which gifts can be given, realised and grown.

3) **Hospitality**. Instead of an exclusive group, a strong community recognises that it is inclusive. Welcoming others is integral, and invites new gifts in turn.

The fourth and fifth elements are of particular interest, because they emphasise that community is not merely a passive entity that is acted upon, but an active force where members act in solidarity and with agency towards a common cause.

To Beyond, community is when people have a "shared concern or shared aspiration, and who come together to do something about it." Coming together means building relationships and recognising a sense of interdependence between people who act — as opposed to being acted on — as citizens in collective action.

Collective action requires an environment for it to be expressed, an environment where collective action is encouraged rather than sanctioned. In this manner, the infrastructure, space and agency to associate and act are as critical to community as the people. According to a respondent, community is strengthened when members:

> … have the right to associate, fewer barriers, access to spaces — don't
> have to pay fees to use the space in the CC (community centres), to cook
> together, [when there are not] so many regulations to playing in the void
> deck…

However, as members tend to associate, gather and express solidarity around common norms, attitudes and interests, it is important that values such as inclusivity and hospitality are fostered and can thrive, in order to cultivate communities that are not only strong but inclusive and hospitable to its own members — and to others.

As communities become more close-knit, they cultivate their own values, routines and intimacies — an in-group mentality which can, intentionally or not, be overly intrusive to its own members' lives, while excluding outsiders. One respondent cautioned against overly romanticising community while ignoring its flip side:

> … the sense of intimacy [in community] also means less [opportunity for]
> boundaries where people might seek to have them for themselves.
> Conformity is more enforced in community. If you are gay in a village…no
> anonymity…. There are all these strategies of building community that
> mitigates these kinds of toxic elements. Cultivating a community that
> embraces diversity and is inclusive [is important]. When you create
> community, you create outsiders. You create an in-group and therefore an
> out-group as well.

Alongside solidarity and agency, it is as important in a community to cultivate a spirit of hospitality, inclusiveness and being open to new members.

An asset-based approach gives power back to the community without ignoring the many challenges that members face

Beyond adopts a **strengths-based** or **asset-based** community development (ABCD) approach, which entails approaching people as experts of their own lives, and who have the resources and talents to contribute towards mitigating difficulties or solving problems. According to a respondent, this is in comparison with a deficit-based approach in which the focus is on understanding clients' needs (deficits), one that is more typical of social service

provision, in which professionals and experts create and deliver solutions to meet the needs of individual clients:

> From a deficit or risk based perspective … if a person is losing everything in her life, so have to get her on track, from a counselling perspective. But if we look at restorative practice, the focus is on rebuilding relationships, to work with friends, call for a family conference, and see the crises as opportunity, to create authentic conversations.

The key difference is not whether the work is done *in* the community (since there are many community-based services) but whether it is done *with* and *by* the community, i.e., members of the community come together to take ownership of their own issues and make decisions for themselves. The goal is to develop a community response to local issues, which can often be simple and powerful compared to formal services.

> Families do have certain requirements and needs. It's more about the approach, how we speak to someone. If we talk to them as the needy ones, it already demeans their self-esteem. If like that, I am at the receiving end, I am inferior. For example, the food. Of course we have food rations and distribution. But instead of us determining what food they need, it's the parents deciding what food they need, [and] they [themselves] distribute.
>
> Beyond staff

Although Beyond's primary work is with children and youth, it works with the communities in which they are embedded. This means working with families, neighbourhoods and other communities where adults and other children and youth can work together to solve problems communally. This effectively means identifying and leveraging community assets and strengths to meet community needs, while avoiding state intervention and professionalised services where possible. At the same time, the community is empowered to solve communal problems on their own without needing to rely on external agents. (Why this is important is discussed more extensively in the subsequent section.)

Taking the example of a case of child abuse in the neighbourhood, which can warrant investigation, and potential extrication of the child by child protection services, a staff member explains how one might analyse a case using an ABCD approach:

> [It's about returning] the decision-making power back to family. For example, if the child is not taken care of by parents, because the father is drunk, a CPO (Child Protective Officer) comes and threatens to take child away. And institutionalisation is not good for kids. So what a Family Group Conference[7] does is … we extend the circle … close relatives and neighbours … and the social workers, police, etc. … and the family is alone in the room, and we give them a particular question, and they decide how to tackle the problem. For example, neighbours say they can take care [of

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[7] A Family Group Conference is a "voluntary consensual decision-making meeting for a family or community group to develop and implement a plan that resolves issues surrounding offending, or keeping children safe and well cared for." (Siriwardane & Lim, 2004, p.1). See the full report here by the Restorative Justice Service and Beyond Social Services: http://beyondresearch.sg/report/FCG%20-%20B.pdf

the child] until they sort out the issue. The plan has to be agreed on by CPO, etc.

In this manner, institutionalisation of the child can be avoided, as community agents are brought together to resolve what might otherwise be seen as an individual family's problem.

According to Beyond, it is important not to misunderstand that such a strengths-based approach dismisses or ignores the negative aspects or challenges faced by a community. Rather, it embraces these challenges as opportunities for people to come together to work on them, as a staff respondent pointed out:

> There is often a misunderstanding of what is an asset-based approach. People's pain is an asset. People coming together to deal with something difficult is an asset. Simplistic dismissal, focusing on the good things and pushing [the bad] under the carpet [is not the way].

To her, dismissing people's pain and problems prevents difficult issues from being surfaced and grappled with, understood, and acted upon — a strengths-based approach sees pain as an asset that could turn these troubles into strengths or opportunities for the community to rally together.

A different approach from the system of professionalised social services

> There is a fundamental difference between a "community" logic and a "systems" logic. Systems solve things. Community strengthens you to confront things.
>
> Beyond staff

As seen in the child protection case, what this philosophy and approach translates to in concrete terms is a **different way of dealing with social problems** in comparison with an established, formal system of professionalised social services.

Take the example of a mother who suffered from schizophrenia, and who was not able to care for or send her children to school. Should one have had alerted the authorities, the children would have been taken away from the mother by Child Protection Services, a formal service. The mother would also have been institutionalised.

However, applying an ABCD lens to the problem revealed that a less intrusive solution lay with her neighbours: Since their children went to the same school, all that was needed was to work with the mother's neighbours to chaperone the mother's children to school. Unlike formal services, which have a clearer albeit more rigid scope of service provision, activating the mother's neighbours produced other benefits including emotional and communal support; these neighbours were able to support the mother by checking in on her, bringing her food, but more importantly, holding her *accountable* to her own recovery (i.e., taking medication according to timeline, giving herself the time and space to convalesce, accepting support from others to recover) in a manner that a clinical service would not allow.

These gestures of goodwill could be gained only because the process of decision-making was given to the family, and extended to a wider neighbourly circle of support. When faced with a problem, instead of passing the problem to state actors, members of the community can be mobilised to "help a neighbour" — the goodwill and interdependency generated in these interactions go a long way in terms of strengthening trust and ultimately wide communal bonds.

Another example to illustrate Beyond's approach is with regard to dealing with drug pushers in the neighbourhood. In Singapore, it is typical to defer to the authorities to address such issues. State-led public education and community-based projects would be part of the strategy as well, and preventive drug education forms the "first line of defence in Singapore's overall drug control strategy" according to the Bureau[8] (ASEAN Preventive Drug Education, 2018). This includes educational campaigns to help parents identify if their children are taking drugs, or to engage children and students on the ills of drug consumption. Some examples include the annual Anti-Drug Abuse Campaign by the Bureau and the National Council Against Drug Abuse or the *Dadah Itu Haram* (*Drugs Are Forbidden*) campaign by Parliamentary Secretary for Home Affairs and Health Amrin Amin.

In contrast, Beyond's approach is to invite parents in the community to come together to share and learn from one another about how much they know about drug issues in the neighbourhood. They also hold separate conversations with the youth, find out what they know, and what they might want to do in support of drug prevention. It has also supported arts-based methods such as forum theatre in order to find out what the community thinks is happening, and what action they would like to take.

Beyond partnered with Applied Drama students from Singapore Polytechnic and produced *Apa Hal (What's The Problem?)*, a forum theatre performance in the Bukit Ho Swee neighbourhood which reflected on issues of addiction.[9] It was a performance where participants were invited to comment on specific drug-related vignettes that were depicted, and how they would intervene in such scenarios. This helped to unearth different perspectives, different ways of how to deal with specific issues, and learn about different factors that contribute to addiction and its persistence. In hearing different opinions and having difficult conversations, residents can also ultimately decide for themselves what is best.

As one respondent put it, Beyond's role is to:

> … activate you (i.e., member of community) and de-escalate the problem as soon as possible, so you don't have to get into conflict with the authorities. Problem de-escalation is about whether you have crossed a line where something needs to be reported to the police. If not, how can you be cared for and function in the community? Activating your personal resources, people who care about you. This needs a fair amount of collaboration.

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[8] For more information, see here: https://www.cnb.gov.sg/aseanpde/about/preventive-drug-education-approaches/singapore

[9] In forum theatre, audience members are invited to engage with and influence the outcome of performances.

Figure 2. A conversation between community workers and parents in the community. Photo: Beyond Social Services

Ultimately, the goal of Beyond is to effectively delay and prevent systems-based intervention in people's lives. This is not because systems are ineffective — rather, they can prevent individuals and communities from being empowered to take charge of their problems, while simultaneously creating relationships of dependency between individuals and service agencies. Beyond believes that when a community works on an issue together, they can act in both simple and powerful ways where formalised services are not able to. As a staff respondent reflected:

> Families have children taken away or incarcerated, or youth get put in juvenile institutions. And every family has a social worker, just people who direct their lives from a systems perspective, telling them how to live their lives. But there are many simple and powerful ways community can intervene and help … so many things that are possible when the community is [willing to] be vulnerable and talk about difficult things.

Beyond's work is upstream and preventive, and where possible, focuses on communal and systemic change

The value of Beyond's asset-based approach is that it can be meaningfully **upstream and preventive**. Instead of focusing on a specific case (i.e., individual or family), as with case management, Beyond's work goes upstream — it sees and emphasises the value of the wider

community in individual change work, and pursues systemic change at the individual, family, and community levels.

Undoubtedly, this work is often difficult, not least because it compels staff to involve others in the community, and to confront the wide range of issues that people face. One respondent noted:

> … realise that the work has to take place more out there with the community [as opposed to in peoples' homes], building the relationship of the family with the community, meeting families more, understanding them. I had social work training, and I see the difference between working with them as humans, not as a case. They can't take care of their children, but that's not the only thing, they face many other issues.

A more formalised casework procedure might take into consideration a limited set of issues as defined by organisational priorities and reportable key performance indicators (KPIs); this is not surprising, given the propensity of most service-centred organisations to strategise in terms of focussing on performing services to the best and most effective degree to meet social needs.

Beyond sees the solutions to problems less in terms of external, formal services but in the community and the assets they possess. This has the added effect of preventing unnecessary state intervention, when families or the community can be mobilised to support others in the community in a safe and empowering manner. Further, increase in participation from families or the community enhances their ability to reflect critically on the issues they face and their capabilities to react on it.

However, this approach is challenging because upstream work is less compelling to certain donors. A board member noted that Beyond's approach is preventive, but is difficult to explain to stakeholders because "if fracture leg, fix leg [sic], but [people] won't give me money to buy new shoes to prevent me from falling down." He noted that donors would give money when they "see the suffering", though to Beyond it does not make sense to solve the problem only when suffering and damage is wrought, for example, by offering help to people only when they become drug addicts, as in a casework-based approach.

Beyond's work is long term and often less visible to the public or on paper. This is because meaningful community development work is a process and it takes time for people facing different permutations of social issues to gather together in relationships of trust, interpersonal vulnerability and mutual support, then work on those issues — though in sustainable, meaningful and community-driven ways.

Nonetheless, this approach appears to be deeply transformative to those who adopt it, and there seems to be deep satisfaction at being able to empower residents than to inadvertently create dependency on formalised services. Beyond also emphasises that such an approach does not undermine the relevance of social service provision in general, but raises the question of whether and under what conditions informal support may be more adequate.

The Role of an Embedded Community Organisation

In thinking about the work that Beyond does — unearthing and optimising community assets while reducing dependence on formal social services — one question had to be asked: Given that Beyond itself is a registered charity, and to some extent a formal organisation that employs salaried community workers, is its existence in any way contradictory to asset-based principles or local community response? Will formal organisations faced with various pressures form its operating environment choose to prioritise its own organisational self-interest instead of communal interests?

Looking deeper at how Beyond grapples its identity as an organisation and as an asset-based community builder, can prove instructive.

Beyond's approach to community development

Based on how Beyond defines and approaches community and community development, it is germane to consider what the organisation believes are essential to do community development work well.

First, Beyond regards being embedded in the community as a key factor in the work. In order to build community, one has to be part of the community. This axiom is not merely rhetorical, but necessary for Beyond staff to deeply appreciate the problems of the communities that they work with, as well as their strengths and assets — all which may not be fully apparent on first sight.

Such deep appreciation is also possible only with ample trust and rapport from the community, which is slowly and preciously earned through being invested in the community and its relationships for the long haul. Individual members of the community can also learn to build deep relationships and trust that will allow staff to do community work. For example, in its engagement with youth, Beyond strives to keep in touch with and maintain close relationships with them until 25 years old.[10]

Beyond's community workers see personal relationships as central to their work, and therefore may accept invitations to social events organised by community members such as weddings, graduation ceremonies and celebrations in members' homes. While less common for social workers or case workers wishing to maintain professional distance, Beyond perceives attending such events as a natural part of being embedded in a community and more importantly, a means of recognising the hospitality and contributions of members rather than reinforcing their identity as beneficiaries dependent on goodwill.

Second, it is important to create the conditions for a community to come together. This involves two things: forming the community and empowering the community.

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[10] This has been one of Beyond's objectives for a number of years. It hopes to measure the impact of its work through assessing their youth when they reach the age of 25.

> The real, strong community is one that can come together, voice out, make decisions together and seek support if they don't have internal resources.
>
> Beyond management

> … able to take ownership and act together. When you have some amount of power and influence over your lives … barriers to community often lies beyond it [as well]. If you are willing to act, pull resources but are shut down and sanctioned, then don't know that you are strong.
>
> Beyond staff

Before members of a community might be willing to step forward and be involved, the community itself has to be formed first. Members of the community need to get to know one another first, before being willing the chance to step forward and be involved. Getting to know one another means going beneath the surface of labels and *prima facie* characteristics, and realising each other's shared concerns, issues and aspirations, and the possibility that each can play a part in meeting them. A sense of identity and belonging also needs to be developed in order to promote solidarity, which Bhattacharyya argues is the "essential characteristic" of community (2004, p.10).[11]

As a community comes together in solidarity, they also have to be empowered to act, and be defined by agency — the ability to "create, reproduce, change, and live according to their own meaning systems, to have the powers to define themselves as opposed to being defined by others" (Bhattacharyya, 2004, p.12). In this regard, community work should be targeted at removing barriers to action, and promoting the power of the community not least to define themselves with respect to the society around them.

Third and most significantly, as the community begins to grow, it is equally important to appreciate its logic and rhythms, in order to know how to work with the community This means knowing when to work alongside the community, getting involved at the right time, getting out of the way when necessary, and not sticking dogmatically to certain visions of success that may not reflect what the community cares about.

Unlike societies, clubs, formal organisations and other modes of organised life, which operate on the basis of specific rules and purposes, contracts or codified procedures, a community is comparatively egalitarian and fluid in its logics and rhythms. A staff respondent expressed it this way:

> Community bonds and strength is not a graph that keeps going up. It's more like a wave, one that goes up and down. For example, when the community is tired, step back. Sometimes people leave, or staff leave, and relationships with the community is lost.

Beyond expects that communities will change and evolve constantly, and it is important to expect that community initiatives come in waves. As time passes and as members of the

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[11] It is also worth noting that Bhattacharyya (2004) argues that the task of building solidarity is made more difficult in the case of place-based communities (which Beyond mostly works with) as industry and modernity have effectively decoupled individuals away from communal norms and culture.

community come and go, some initiatives will — and should — die out from disuse, with new ones taking its place to meet new communal issues and desires.

An important capability of community work is therefore to be responsive to the community. In other words, programmes and initiatives should be community-centric by adapting and responding to the community, rather than be programme-centric and driven by the service provider.[12] Such an approach is different from a more formalised system of services, in which specific programmes and services are created, optimised and then sustained over long periods of time, invariant of changes in community: the objective in this case is to provide more effective, rather than responsive, services.

Another component of Beyond's style of community work is to resist transactional relationships typical of a consumer society. In a consumerist culture, people are used to meeting needs, and obtaining goods and services primarily through monetary exchange — through entering into transactional relationships and contracts with one another. The dominance of such relationships, however, is antithetical to the logic of community, as one staff respondent noted, "Social capital is the foundation of community, and the currency of community is goodwill."

In this line of thinking, meeting needs and obtaining goods and services is not governed by an ethos of transaction or financial exchange, but focuses instead on how these processes can be achieved *together with others* in the same community. Thus, the ethos of a community is different from a consumer society, in which

> … if I want something I [just] buy something. In a community, if I want something, [it's about] how I create it with the people around me…we are so used to consuming, we don't try to act on our own anymore.

> Beyond management

This recollection by a staff member, about an event that Beyond wanted to facilitate, sheds light on the difference between a transactional as opposed to a community logic — a logic that community workers take with them to work.

> … [because] the CC charges for chairs, we thought, should we ask families to provide [the chairs] and we pay them for it? [But] then it becomes a transaction, it becomes a difficult space to hold … are we using their labour for free? But when we talk to them about it, and they provide, they say "I didn't know that my home is a place that I can host people in" and there is a sense of pride and ownership.

It can be argued that this represents an ideal situation; indeed, not all exchanges are clear-cut and as fruitful. Sometimes, encounters with community can be met with silence, though appreciating a community also means respecting community members' choice not to engage at the moment; it is important not view a disengaged member as a "failure" in the larger, longer scheme of community development work. Said one respondent:

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[12] This approach is reminiscent of the Cassia Resettlement Team (see Annex A).

> Some community members don't want to be disturbed by us. If [a] family don't come out, [we] see it as choice. It's not a failure if they don't come out.

Doing community development work well means understanding that members can have different priorities, interests and levels of willingness to engage in community activities, which must be respected. Not every single member needs to participate in activities; little spots of activity here and there matter.

One respondent pointed out that a community is more like a "jazz band" than an "orchestra". Even though community members improvise and collaborate with each other in different ways, much like a jazz band, the collective is still able to produce harmony, however unstructured.

A final and profound aspect of Beyond's approach to community development regards community as an end in itself, and not as a means to achieve externally or administratively defined goals. Community workers appreciate that a community is not just about solving problems and meeting each other's needs — it means caring about one another, even if it does not manage to solve the problems at hand. It makes life bearable, or even worthwhile. Sometimes, having a sense of community helps people embrace life instead of see it as a sequence of problems that require solutions. A broader point to accept is that it is impossible to solve all of one's problems, but that is possible to face the vicissitudes and inevitabilities of life together:

> In community, there is a sense that suffering is a part of life, but we will care for each other. Ageing is not a problem to be solved but a reality to be embraced. Within a systemic logic, we must address, come up with solutions, instead of seeing it as a natural part of life which can be enriching, to children to etc. Reality of community is not so much problematised, just sit with it.
>
> Beyond staff

This logic is in contrast to a service-based approach to living, in which challenges are considered problems to be solved through programmes and services, and in the most efficient and cost-effective manner.

Safeguarding the community

> Are we mobilising the communities to meet corporate interest, or mobilising corporate resources to meet communities' interest?
>
> Beyond staff

Beyond has taken on the role of safeguarding the community, and regards it as almost a sacred duty that should be done with the highest regard, care and constant reflexivity. The organisation and its leaders are fully aware of the imbalance of power between organisations

(including their own) and the members of disadvantaged communities, and take great pains to behave as a conduit for communal interests and not their own.

> Are you working in the service of the community agenda and efforts, [or] invent[ing] a project that will make you feel better about yourself?
>
> > Beyond staff

This kind of reflection is uncommon in other non-profit organisations. Concretely, this translates to behaviour that may even come at Beyond's own expense. For example, the organisation often finds themselves refusing funding or resources from external agencies (e.g., government, corporate sponsors), in order to safeguard the dignity of the community as well as the integrity of their mission as community developers. One specific example: While within the dominant paradigm of charity fundraising, a common strategy to encourage donations involve featuring "sob stories" about the lives of clients, Beyond ensures that they do not "make use" of members of the community that way.

The way that Beyond sees themselves is also rather unique, as they see themselves as members of the community, rather than just external entities or service-providers. Consider this perspective by a former staff of Beyond who now works in a social service agency[13]:

> I need these people to come to the services more than they need to come — because professionals draw their pay check from working with the poor. Keep replicating and producing. [Follow] some master plan so you build build build. Easy life, 6pm you go home, predictable, can go look after family and have a life.

Compare that with the account that Beyond's Executive Director often asks:

> It's a question that everyone in the helping profession should be thinking about: Why should I get paid? It's a very artificial thing … volunteers or family care for themselves and they don't get paid. Why is it that we should get paid. This is a perpetual question that we should struggle with….

Questioning the amount one should earn is a common question, but questioning if one should even be paid is quite another, which is testament to the idea that Beyond takes the work of safeguarding the community seriously, even at the expense of greater organisational considerations, and to the point of constantly questioning the validity of their work to make sure that they do not compromise on community interests.

Safeguarding the community has to tread an often uncertain balance between being a neutral conduit for whatever the community is interested in and taking a prescriptive approach to guide them towards positive behaviour. There is therefore a commitment to be comfortable with ambiguity, and be in constant doubt about whether all that one does is in the interest of the community.

This reflexiveness is generated at the leadership level, and which has translated to organisational reflexivity, leading to the need for alternative or looser KPIs so that work that is

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[13] As it was told to and recounted by Beyond's Executive Director.

meaningful to the community can flourish. Such constant self-reflection has resulted in, for example, a difficult dialogue about the value of distributing corporate gifts to the community that may not be meaningful in the long-term, such as if said gifts do not meet community needs or serve to develop community in the ABCD sense. If KPIs were set to measure the monetary value of goods that pass through Beyond, this might look impressive from an organisational standpoint, but can also lull an organisation, or outsiders, into thinking that this is meaningful work.

It is common in the charity sector to give a wide latitude to anyone who does any kind of social good, and it is easy to come away looking good because few would challenge good intentions or question well-meaning behaviour. Hence, it is rare for any organisation to self-impose this culture of constant self-reflection and interrogation, to ensure moral checks and balances where much less is actually expected.

An organisational culture of community, to serve the community

> Almost nothing is done directively, everything has to be done by earning
> the mandate, everyone fully come on board … so it takes a long time. There
> are certain merits to that …. Because it is so challenging to work like that,
> you need a lot more clear [sic] communication.
>
> Beyond staff

According to a board member of Beyond, the organisation feels like a community itself, from the organisational culture to the way that its staff thinks. It strives to have maintain a flat hierarchy because, in his words, one "can't be hierarchical and do community work." Leaders see the need to hold the space for dialogue and the importance of being uncertain, instead of making premature decisions to set directions for everyone to go along with.

Individual staff with good ideas and initiatives have to earn the mandate of the whole organisation by persuading everyone, though this can be frustrating from an efficiency point of view. However, the payoff is that staff have the space to deliberate carefully as a community and move together as an organisation, provided they manage to convince colleagues to get on board with their ideas. Fostering strong relationships is just as essential among Beyond staff, as it is with residents in the community, according to a staff member:

> [I] can't imagine shouting at my colleague and expecting him to be kind
> when he goes in [the community]. The way you go about the work … it's
> the relationship that matter, the communication [and] how we listen.

However, this can create a situation where the leadership is misunderstood as being unclear or lacking direction, because of their insistence on constant reflection and uncertainty that is necessary to safeguard the community. The challenge would then be the lack of clarity with regard to who does what, as reflected by another staff member:

> Role is sometimes uncertain and ambiguous. Gerard strives not to be
> hierarchical. It is a flat structure. Benefit is that people can see you and
> approach you as and when. Open invitation and Gerard can just go talk to
> staff. What is not so good is that sometimes role becomes unclear.

In a sense, the organisation operates as a community as well as a bureaucracy.

Hiring practices may sometimes seem too informal or irrational by conventional HR practices, though they are meant to communicate Beyond's approach to community, impress upon applicants the personal sacrifices and vulnerability required, and to assess the applicant's fit within these parameters.

Interviews are usually conducted in the evenings or on weekend mornings, and applicants will have to be oriented to the job as part of the application. This includes a lengthy trial process where they will have to shadow existing staff and participate in community activities, during which they can have open conversations about the work with staff members.

The hiring process usually involves evaluations by many existing members of staff, particularly senior staff. Following the trial process, staff will have to make recommendations to HR and senior staff concerning the applicant's observed behaviours and potential. Recommended applicants would then have to meet with the Executive Director in an open and frank conversation about working at Beyond: the emotional labour required, financial vulnerability of the organisation and lower salaries relative to other agencies, and Beyond's work potentially being misunderstood by others. The conversation would also cover the applicant's own values and how suitable they are for the job.

Challenges

Given that Beyond's commitment to a strengths-based approach to community development that does not sit comfortably in the service delivery paradigm of the social sector, it has had to overcome several major challenges in their endeavours.

Going against the grain of mainstream, professionalised social services

> One of the biggest accomplishments of Beyond is that it exists. In the context of Singapore, the government only funds KPIs, and we don't have KPIs that the government wants.
>
> Beyond management

As a result of doing work that is different from the dominant social service paradigm, running an organisation that stays true to asset-based community development principles, and appreciating the value of community life, stakeholders may not always understand or fully appreciate the logic of community work or the value of an organisation like Beyond.

Beyond rejects what they deem to be the narrative of the professionalised social services sector. In their view, this narrative disempowers people from forming relationships with one another, instead: 1) encouraging individuals to focus on their needs, and how those needs can be met through professionalised services, and 2) perpetuating the logic of a zero-sum game where needy individuals will always have to compete with one another for a limited supply of financial assistance or other social services. A staff respondent reflected:

> Instead of a collective future, where our fates and well-being are tied up with one another, [it is] more like we are competing with one another for well-being. A lot of policy is designed that way, [there is a] criteria for who gets it, and if you get it, others cannot. Pit [people] against one another. Instead of we all invest [sic] in public good and all get access to it. People have to perform their needs and appear more needy than others to get them [social support].

Such services tend to encourage people to be dependent on the state rather than people in their community, or themselves. In the communities that they work with, Beyond notices the pervasive rootedness of a service-centred mindset, in which individuals become clients to those services, rather than relying on each other and perceiving their assets. This becomes a barrier to the asset-based community ethos that Beyond strives for.

> People have [a] deep sense that they must trust and depend on systems to meet their needs, rather than their neighbour. You are going to write to [your] town council rather than talk to your neighbours. Strong colonisation by systems of people's lives. Then your lifeworld[14] is depleted .... People's

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[14] This term is with reference to Jürgen Habermas' theory of the "colonisation of the lifeworld", in which he suggests — in brief — that a systems-oriented logic is gradually overpowering peoples' sensibilities of the world as they know it in interaction with one another. A helpful discussion can be found in Burns & Früchtel (2014).

ability to support each other, is diminished. All of our solutions lie in a system, over professionalised system, rather than vibrant community.

The dominance of a charity mindset among sponsors, donors and funders

In Singapore, the dominance of the social service paradigm cannot be divorced from the charity model which looms over it. Although many social services are funded by the state, a large proportion also comes from donations (Sim, Ghoh, Loh & Chiu, 2015). Many non-profits are driven by both financial considerations and constraints, and Beyond is no exception to this rule.

Beyond has the role of channelling such resources from corporates to the community, which creates a considerable tension between meeting the objectives of donors, who have their own set of goals in the course of providing funds, and ensuring that the community is not left disempowered. However, because of its asset-based principles, it faces the additional challenge of staying true to its tenets of community development while not losing out on an important source of funding with which to fund its work.

Figure 3. Beyond Social Services' premises at the void deck of 26 Jalan Klinik, possibly the oldest void deck in Singapore (National Heritage Board, 2013). Photo: Beyond Social Services

For a long time, Beyond had set themselves as a middleman between donors and the community, channelling resources appropriately in accordance with community needs. However, one form of corporate gifting has to do with non-monetary gifts, such as t-shirts. These are not things that the community might need, yet to refuse such gifts might seem rude

from the perspective of the corporate, when seen from a charity lens where charity-funded agencies and the communities "should" accept such gifts gratefully.

In the t-shirt example, Beyond tried to balance two goals: 1) To distribute the t-shirts, but 2) bring community members to do the distribution, as a means of encouraging them to interact with other residents. This move however, has "weakened" the community because the act of gift distribution is administrative; the community is brought together merely to receive gifts as subjects for whom charity is meant, as opposed to building solidarity or agency, and coming together instead to solve important issues that they face as a community.

One can thus observe how the self-interests of those who want to help communities, may be unintentionally counter-productive to the community, and that there is a risk of displacing the interests of the community in the interest of maintaining good relationships with corporates that are important funders of Beyond.

> [There are] many of distributions, many times we have to do events, "must-take events" … [for] corporations that we have long standing relationships [with], it becomes a bit annoying because some of these organisations are very, how to put it politely, they do it just for their KPIs, and not because they really care about Beyond or the community. There is a movie outing and Beyond must provide 40 families. [Between the] partnership team and community team, [the partnership team] comes back to say, "Ok, these corporates, must do" …. Whether can find enough families …. It really depends on how much the families and youth have a stake in. If just do an event and invite [sic], numbers dwindle. If they were not part of organising it, then numbers low. Unless it's like going to science centre. We are mindful of doing only those things where there is need or interest, or we involve them.
>
> Beyond staff

As Beyond has a vastly different paradigm and approach from other dominant institutions, the work of convincing stakeholders such as donors or possible funders tends to be more challenging, and the latter needs to understand and buy in into Beyond's ethos first.

Stakeholders may not recognise the meaningfulness of community-level outcomes such as solidarity and agency

The lack of understanding about Beyond's ethos among stakeholders also leads to challenges in measuring its success. Success measurement has become increasingly important in Singapore, particularly in the non-profit and public service sectors, where principles of new public management (NPM) have taken root in an attempt to improve efficiency through private sector business practices and management models. NPM represents a shift from process-oriented accountability to results-based accountability, and the development of explicit and measurable standards of performance (Hood, 1995).

In the charity sector in Singapore, of which Beyond is a part, business-like financial and management techniques such as benchmarking, performance measurement, self-evaluation, financial accounting standards, and strategic planning. Such practices aim to enable greater efficiency, accountability, and transparency (Lee & Haque, 2004).

Most charities derive their funding from external sources, typically government grants and donations (Sim, Ghoh, Loh & Chiu, 2015), making them vulnerable to such funders' demands for some degree of accountability and measurement of success achieved. Although, how does one measure success with something as abstract as community development?

Success can be viewed very differently depending on what one's goals are. Many funders look for strength in numbers: Charities that reach out to the greatest number of people via their programmes and services (professional termed "clients" or "service-users") are typically deemed as successful ones. Numbers tend to be reported prominently in many charities' annual reports as a means to communicate the success of their services and programmes, and thus, an appeal to maintain funders' continual support.

However, taking a community-centred lens to success requires one to be sensitive to the issues, rhythms and logics of community — including that different people and communities can define success differently, and it might not just be about numbers. The success of community development work need not be about getting the greatest number of people to congregate together for an activity, but could involve many kinds of activities done by different groups of people in a community. For example, in talking about community work, a Beyond staff notes:

> We've not lost them if they don't come to join conversation. Community is not 20 people …. [it] can be three to four people doing something here, some others do something else. Not everybody must do everything together … almost like fireworks, little spurts, and all together create with beautiful blaze of light. Beautiful story, but actually involve small numbers.

Being sensitive to the needs and wishes of the community may also means balancing the volition, and agenda of the community alongside accountability requirements; in practice, this might mean holding difficult but meaningful conversations about how to stop the problem of drug-pushing in a neighbourhood, as opposed to organising a public education campaign. The latter may draw much attention and footfall, but the ultimate outcome of preventing drug abuse might not be met without tough, intimate conversations and discussions on how the community can take action.

The ideal state for Beyond would be that KPIs be about team success, personal accountability and integrity, and professional development. In reality, KPIs Beyond provides depend on "who is asking" and change based on how deep the work is, said a member of Beyond's management: For some neighbourhoods, KPIs are simple, and for others they are more complex. Beyond does record simple KPIs such as rental block presence, households covered, programme attendance numbers, number of people that Beyond is connected to and the level of connection with these people.

Competitive relationships with VWOs and grassroots organisations

Other VWOs working with disadvantaged communities who are used to service rather than community-driven approaches, or grassroots organisations, may see Beyond as competing with them.

Due to Beyond's community-centred approach, and because communities are rarely afflicted with just one problem or issue, the organisation ends up getting its hands dirty trying to resolve

a multitude of issues. However, this often leads it to step into the "territory" or "boundaries" of service-based agencies, who might see Beyond's efforts as duplicative, unnecessary or in conflict with their own. This leads to frequent attempts to negate Beyond's interventions, and agencies often try to do this through prioritising programmatic goals and "alignment" instead of community goals. As a staff respondent elaborated:

> Community gardening … disallowed, unless you get permission. They have cut down our trees. Can only do things that are part of their projects, policed and designed by them. A lot of our work is negotiating with regulators.

Given that many community spaces are administered by the PA, sometimes permission is not given, and space not provided for free to allow communities to convene as well. A community worker commented specifically on RCs and CCs, who are major gatekeepers to common community spaces such as fields, centres and event venues:

> Working with grassroots organisation is a big big big challenge. We do not earn any money from the families we work with. If we want space, the CC or RC not collaborative. They would want to charge us money as they would charge the public. The grassroots don't even want to understand the work we are doing. They see us as competitors rather than see us as supplementary. The whole point of CC and RC is having community space.

One way of dealing with this is by building good relationships with members of the community so much so that Beyond becomes perceived as an asset to RCs and CCs in the respective communities that they work with. However, as with corporate donors, there is a risk of community interests being compromised for the sake of RC and CC events. Said the previous staff respondent:

> But we are often in a much weaker position. CC or RCs say this is our territory, you just work in Bukit Ho Swee. So we have to go in to build relationships and goodwill. Where we do work, we are perceived to have the strongest relationships. So the RCs and CCs ask us to find people for events. People see us as knowing the community, and … workers can tell you who is in what unit.

Community lacks competence, solidarity and power

In many cases, communities themselves may have no competence or will to get to know one another, and to act collectively in its interest. Part of the reason might be Singaporeans' political apathy and sense of disempowerment leading many to focus on self-interests and economic modes of engagement instead (Chong, 2005). This is exacerbated by the reality that systemic change is always difficult, and that many barriers exist to community formation in Singapore — even when community forms, they may not have power to act.

Another reason might be because communities have not had the opportunity to exercise their civic muscle in effective ways. Communities seldom have difficult conversations with one another about issues that matter to them, and issues that they wish to work collectively on. Difficult conversations tend to be avoided because it is perceived that they can cause communal division, or might be deemed "too sensitive" to be talked about. This is a challenge that Beyond constantly deals with in the course of its work.

People tend to shy away from difficult conversations with one another, also because of the pervasiveness of a service or systems-based logic, which entails outsourcing solutions away from the community to a formal service, as opposed to rallying others in the course of a communal solution. Despite Beyond being known as a community building agency, residents in the community "sometimes think of Beyond as their social workers" as one interviewee pointed out.

Staff members lamented the interventionist logic that the state takes with regard to community development, which goes against the asset-based logic that Beyond adopts. Taking an asset-based lens, community is something that should develop organically as opposed to through statist intervention where standards, goals or values are stipulated by which community should develop. Said two staff members:

> Community is not another one of those things where we have to do. It's like a forest. You don't plant a forest, you safeguard it and the forest grows on its own. Cultivation. Protecting and safeguarding the space.

> If you want to safeguard community, you should not be government …. Government can only facilitate the conditions for community to emerge.

Beyond's work with the community often involves thinking about how to "draw the community out", said yet another staff member. Building rapport, trust, and interest in a collective solution is difficult in communities that have learnt to be apathetic, or are fearful of reprisal.

Case Lessons and Insights

1) **Regard the community as an asset, rather than just having problems or needs.**

There is an over-professionalisation of social services, which has led to a culture of dependency and a lack of awareness, and cognizance that the community has untapped assets, strengths and potential. In turn, the community lacks civic participation as well as ownership over communal problems.

Beyond and other voluntary efforts at ground-up community development in Singapore can build strong bonds and encourage mutual support, especially when it is community-centric and allows genuine participation and ownership.

However, this is predicated on the government and professional social services stepping aside at times, and allowing community to have the chance to organise themselves and learn how to solve their own problems, however messy.

From the point of view of a highly involved state, this can mean rewarding process and effort rather than simple output, and giving due credit to community participation, community leaders who step up, and smaller-scale activities that are sensitive and nuanced to the community's many and shifting needs, desires and rhythms. It also means playing a facilitative role, removing barriers to community organisation while building physical and social infrastructure that is accessible to all.

2) **Community work should proliferate, not scale.**

The existing framework of accountability, drawn from principles of NPM, is limited not only in its inability to assess the success of community development efforts meaningfully, but also in putting efficiency and funder requirements first, which means that the requirements of meaningful community work, and the communities themselves, take a step back. As one board member explained:

> Every activity, it's not like it's repeating and you continue to run.
> Every event you have to source for it and look for sponsors. How to
> sustain that?

Community work will not be scalable or replicable in the same way as structured social services because of the critical role of the process of community development, which requires attention to each community's specific demographic, context, existing relationships, community spaces and other communal assets in the area.

One can proliferate the asset-based community development approach across different communities, as opposed to replicate what is done from one community to the next. This is because the meaning of replication and scale is different for community development given that every project will be different because every community is different and peculiar in its own way. As Peter Block (2018) puts it, "the small group is the unit of transformation".

Such work also requires people who believe in Beyond's approach and the value of community, who recognise that communities operate on social capital and goodwill, rather than impersonal, transactional relationships. An interviewee noted:

> I prefer people, not dollars … dollars buy you professionals, who will then do the work because you paid them to, a transaction, not community life.

3) **An effective community leader recognises that humility and constant self-reflexivity is critical, because complacency portends exclusion**

> When you become too comfortable with presumed value of what is in the community's interest, you may start to rationalise and [be] lulled into thinking that you are making a difference.
>
> Beyond staff

As an organisation, Beyond is wary of the fact that when community leaders and builders become too comfortable the presumed value of what is in the community's interests, they may start to rationalise and be lulled into thinking that they are making a difference. However, this can spell the beginning of a leader that is complacent, unresponsive and begin to take compromises that are against the community's interests:

> My concern is not that you have to make compromises … but that we justify those compromises … the cost of cognitive dissonance is too much, so you move to that position. So I'm always uncomfortable.
>
> Beyond staff

Beyond feels that organisations and individuals who claim themselves to want to lead communities, need to accept that ambiguity is critical to community, not least because to hold a rigid vision, goal or position in mind, is to mistakenly assume that everyone else thinks the same way. Rigid thinking also tends to exclude rather than be inclusive of views, especially those of new members:

> If you are so sure about somebody being right or wrong, you [start to] use that as basis to include or exclude. Holding steady, being open to other constructions of reality. Openness, not be so cocksure … I'm not saying Beyond is like that, no plans, see what happens, but help people see it like that. We criticise and destroy this view because want to impose goal driven approach. Sometimes I talk they get irritated. Last week, this objectives, this week ... I catch myself. Not for me to teach, people have to discover.
>
> Beyond management

To ensure that complacency does not take hold, immense self-reflexivity is important, not least because it is easy to be overrun by considerations, well-meaning or otherwise, that can nonetheless supplant the community's interests. Constantly questioning oneself is an important way of ensuring that one stays on the right track, in an environment where standardisation and conformity are operating norms.

> Immense self-reflexivity is important for people who are interested in social change. He [Gerard] is critical of us and of himself. And that is crucial, so crucial because so easy to get co-opted by the state, by corporates. He recognises that some of the things we do are compromises. The justifications and rationalisations are dangerous.
>
> Beyond staff

Having strong enlightened leadership goes a long way, and Beyond's staff characterises the Executive Director as having "a complete and utter lack of an ego — [which] makes him able to be self-reflexive. Also a deep understanding and interest…being comfortable with discomfort."

4) **Strong communities need to deal with difficult issues, and take risks.**

Strong communities need to deal with difficult issues, rather than avoid talking about them in the interests of maintaining a false consensus of harmony and peace. This means cultivating a spirit of risk-taking, and taking risks and pains to hold uncomfortable but meaningful conversations with one another as opposed to sweeping contentious matters under the proverbial carpet.

> We need to stay with the discomfort of these things and then hear from them … instead of using some ideological framework [to make sense of the information].
>
> Beyond staff

Strong communities are defined by the quality of their relationships, not by the amount of agreement or commonality that members share with one another. Especially in moments of crisis, communities should not avoid them but embrace them as opportunities for collective action and to bond. In moments where members are hurt, a strong community needs to deal with hurt, and learn how to heal together.[15]

Conclusion

Beyond has proven itself to be a key organisation in the area of community development. We hope this case study would encourage others to find out more about Beyond and community development work. We also hope that the report would spur others to safeguard their communities and do the work of helping to nurture villages.

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[15] One framework to consider in this regard is restorative community justice, which Beyond regularly practices (e.g., Family Group Conferencing)

Discussion Questions

1) Under what conditions will the professionalisation of social services, and of community workers be useful?

2) Given the difference in the logic of community development from social service delivery, what are the implications for social workers who are keen to work with the community?

3) Can an FSC do community development work if there are very specific KPIs expected of them? Is it just a matter of tweaking those KPIs or is there something more fundamental that needs to be modified to do community development?

4) Do community workers need to be embedded in community to do the work well? How embedded do they need to be? Do you need skin the game — such that your well-being is tied to the community's well-being?

5) Do you really need to have run your organisation like a community to work with the community?

6) How can organisations like Beyond develop better relationships with grassroots organisations who are gatekeepers to community space, and other VWOs, who may see them as competitors?

7) If the community faces certain challenges and wants to deal with difficult issues, but sometimes these issues may be considered to be socially divisive or sensitive, how should community development organisations find space to allow some dialogue?

8) Should the government be in the business of community development? If so, what role should they play and what should be done to ensure that it is done meaningfully?

9) What kind of problems should be addressed by professionals and what kind of problems are better addressed by the community themselves?

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Annex A – Voluntary Efforts at Community Development

Alongside entities in the PA system and the CDCs, the following are various examples of non-profit organisations and voluntary groups that do community development in Singapore:

Cassia Resettlement Team (CRT) is a ground-up initiative that seeks to understand and address challenges faced by residents of Block 52 Cassia Crescent. The majority of people staying in that block were relocated from rental flats in Dakota Crescent and Sims Drive, after news of the redevelopment of Dakota Crescent broke in July 2014. The team's objective is to "walk the journey of life with residents and facilitate the growth of communities" (Lim & Howe, 2019). A key principle of CRT is listening to residents not just about what they need but what they would like to have, be it escorting them to medical appointments, bridging them to new service providers or organising potluck lunches between old Dakota Crescent residents. This principle has also influenced how CRT support programmes are run; they are responsive and can be stopped and created based on residents' changing needs.

CRT's members came together out of various civic initiatives: *IgnorLAND of its Loss*, a community-engaged arts project, *Between Two Homes*, a documentary about the relocation process, and Dakota Adventures, which organised resident-led tours of Dakota Crescent. The team is made up of a number of smaller groups of volunteers, each carrying out their individual civic initiatives all sharing a common goal of community development.

Geylang Adventures was founded by Cai Yinzhou, who also started Dakota Adventures. Growing up in Geylang, Cai wanted to re-present his neighbourhood to others from his perspective as a resident who grew up in Geylang. He organises tours of Geylang, guiding people through not only the red-light district for which it is infamously known, but also sites of historical significance in Singapore's history, iconic buildings and architecture, and hawker centres. At times, he also introduces tour participants to people who have lived and worked in the area.

The tours aim to challenge negative perceptions surrounding Geylang, and to introduce elements in Singapore's history not often taught or thought about. Other than Geylang and Dakota Adventures, Cai also founded Backyard Barbers. Together with other volunteers, Cai cuts the hair of mainly migrant workers for free. This has promoted meaningful interaction between volunteers and members of the community, people that the volunteers would otherwise never have interacted with (Wong, 2019).

My Community is a heritage group which "documents social memory, celebrates civic life and champions community heritage" (My Community, 2017). It carries out historical research primarily about the Queenstown neighbourhood in Singapore, and has organised festivals, residential carnivals and urban tours to capture and document Queentown's cultural heritage. From 2010 to 2017, My Community's tours have reached out to nearly 3,000 Singapore residents with the help of some 50 volunteers (Lim, 2017). Specific initiatives include a cultural mapping exercise in Tanglin Halt, and Museum@My Queenstown, a community museum that preserves and features everyday stories about Queenstown told in the form of old photographs and artefacts, and which is "funded, curated and managed mostly through the efforts of residents" (Choo, 2019).

Community for Successful Ageing (ComSA) is a programme by the Tsao Foundation, a non-profit organisation dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for older people. ComSA is an initiative that challenges senior residents to work with other stakeholders to come up with community-relevant solutions for issues that they are experiencing. The programme aims to be a community-wide public health planning approach to create an integrated health and social care system that promotes health and well-being over the life course, and to enable ageing in place (Harding & Lee, 2017).

Annex B – Beyond Social Services' History and Milestones

Beyond Social Services ("Beyond") began as a charity based in Bukit Ho Swee, one of the oldest housing estates in Singapore. It was established in August 1969 in response to the poor living conditions aggravated by several fires that hit the Bukit Ho Swee community in the 1960s. The most destructive fire occurred on 25 May 1961 and devastated 60 acres of squatter settlements resulting in 16,000 homeless people. On 24 November 1968, near the same spot where the 1961 fire began, the homes of 3000 people went up in flames. It was in such a climate that some religious groups and concerned individuals got together to form the Bukit Ho Swee Community Service Project with the aim of helping residents solve problems associated with poverty and crowded living conditions.

Buddhist monks, Catholic missionaries, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran pastors and service clubs pooled their resources to provide free medical treatment and food rations. Community workers were employed, and they encouraged self-help and thrift by helping residents organise themselves into the Bukit Ho Swee Residents´ Multi-Purpose Co-operative Society Ltd. The Co-operative helped residents save on essential household items and second hand schoolbooks. It also secured home-based jobs from factories for residents.

Listening to residents' problems was the easy part of the work — getting them to do something about it was the tough part. When asked to present their views to the relevant authorities or to serve as leaders, residents often felt inadequate citing their illiteracy as the main drawback. Thus, the Project's staff often found their efforts futile and this was discouraging. In 1975 when funds were running low, staff morale was further hit, and the management then decided to cease operations.

After a year of soul-searching, the management of the Project was convinced that the Bukit Ho Swee community was still disadvantaged and in need of community services, and persuaded the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) to include the project under its umbrella of services. The FMM was one of the original initiators of the Project and had been based at Bukit Ho Swee since 1966.

In 1976, the Project reopened and its services focused on children and youths. The premises at Block 44 Beo Crescent, #01–77 was called the Nazareth Centre; and because Bukit Ho Swee Community Service Project was a mouthful, residents affectionately termed the staff as N.C. There was only one staff at the time and the Project depended heavily on volunteers who were mainly residents and their friends.

Since its inception the Project depended on donations from well-wishers and various organisations. Some of these organisations included the World Council of Churches, Misereor, the Australian Catholic Relief, the Isaac Manasseh Meyer Trust Fund, the Shaw Foundation and the Singapore Turf Club. In 1984, the annual operating budget was around $35 000. Relative to other social work agencies, it was not a large amount, yet the Project found it difficult to raise funds. Thus, the Project regarded the invitation to join the Community Chest of Singapore in 1984 as a wonderful opportunity to be relieved of fund-raising worries and to focus on service delivery instead.

On 22 January 1984, the Project moved to bigger premises — its current location at Block 26 Jalan Klinik, #01–52 — and in 1987, registered as an independent society known as the Bukit Ho Swee Social Service Centre. It also became a full member of the then-Singapore Council of Social Service, now known as the National Council of Social Service.

The FMM were conferred founder membership and ordinary membership was opened to all persons aged 21 years old and above who supported our aims. Since 1987, the Management Committee has been elected from among members and our volunteers have always been encouraged to sign up as members.

In 1990, the organisation accepted an invitation by the then-Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) to become a Family Service Centre with support for full funding from Community Chest. As a result, in 1991, it became a full-fledged, one-stop social service centre serving the needs of children, youths, parents and the elderly. In 1992, the Ministry identified the organisation as a benchmark agency for Children, Youth and Volunteer Development Services.

The 1990s also saw the organisation embark on several creative and innovative ways of tackling social problems and meeting community needs. Some of these included the Live-in Therapy Programme for low-income families with multiple problems, the Streetwise Programme to help youths leave street corner gangs, and the Battered Women´s Support Group.

Since it began, the organisation had primarily focused on improving the lives of families and individuals from disadvantaged low-income backgrounds. As the culture of delinquency often thrived among the disadvantaged, it inevitably accumulated much experience and expertise in dealing with delinquency-related issues. Thus, in 2000, with more than 30 years of accumulated expertise, the Project decided to offer its services beyond Bukit Ho Swee. This led to it redefining its vision, mission and goals, and on 15 October 2001, a new name — Beyond Social Services.

Today, Beyond endeavours to deal with the culture of poverty and delinquency on an island-wide basis. As its programmes have grown to the extent where it can no longer simply depend on the funds provided by the Community Chest, fund-raising has once again become a necessary and vital function of the organisation. It's operating expenses are also defrayed by government grants and the generosity of philanthropic establishments, commercial corporations and well-wishers.

Selected Milestones

August 1969	Bukit Ho Swee Community Service Project started. The Project's co-ordinator was Sister Sabine Fernandez of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, and operated from a ground floor unit in Block 44 Beo Crescent.
1975	The Project ceased operation due to lack of staff.
1976	The Project restarted under the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, run by Sister Mary Chua and a few staff and volunteers.
1979	Volunteers from the Project received the National Youth Service Team Award.
1984	The Project moved to current premises at Block 26, Jalan Klinik, #01-52.
1986	Volunteer Tan Siong Woo received the National Youth Service Award
1987	The Project registered as an independent society, and became known as the Bukit Ho Swee Social Service Centre.
1991	Helped the government pilot the Family Service Centre as a community-based social service facility. Family Service Centres are currently a standard feature in neighbourhoods across Singapore.
1997	Helped the National Youth Council pioneer the Streetwise Programme that guides ex-street corner gang members to stay away from crime. To date, 85% of its Streetwise Programme participants have not re-offended.
1998	Introduced the Men-in-Recovery Programme to the Singapore Prisons Service, together with the Society Against Family Violence. The Programme taught anger management skills to prisoners sentenced for domestic violence.
1999	Initiated the Toughlove Parent Support Movement in Singapore to help parents acquire skills in managing teenage delinquent behaviour.
2000	The Family Service Centre relocated to Block 5, Delta Avenue. Premises at Block 26 Jalan Klinik converted to the Hangout, a youth development centre.
2001	Bukit Ho Swee Social Service Centre is renamed Beyond Social Services, with a vision that by 2025 every child and youth in Singapore, despite a disadvantaged background, will have the opportunity to refuse a lifestyle of delinquency and welfare dependency.
	Organised the first Streetwise Run. Between 2005 to 2009, it would be an annual event known as the MILK Run.
	Started the Kids United care and guidance programme.

2002   Helped the government pilot the Healthy Start Programme for two to six year olds, which ensured that children from disadvantaged families received early childhood care and education.

2004   Concerned with the rising juvenile delinquency rate, Beyond established the Restorative Justice Service in an effort to divert young offenders from the criminal justice system. This was after studying the successful Family Group Conferencing Model from New Zealand and introducing it to Singapore.

2005   The MILK (Mainly I Love Kids) Fund began funding Beyond's programmes.

Launched Babes, an SMS crisis hotline and support service to curb the incidence of abandoned babies in Singapore, with the support of several other voluntary welfare partners and the endorsement of both the MCYS and NCSS.

Introduced the adventure based experiential learning programme Campland, and the Juvenile Justice Programme to schools.

Appointed by The Singapore Prisons Service as a Restorative Care Operator for the Reformative Training Centre where young male offenders are housed. Its task is to help these residents successfully move back to their community upon their release.

2006   Introduced the Beautiful People programme to support troubled teenage girls.

Set up two residential facilities, Kids United Home and Community Beyond Home, in consultation with MCYS, for children and youth in need of care, protection, guidance and structure.

Collaborated with the Otto-Friedrich University of Bamberg, Germany to run a customised Diploma in Social Work Practice Programme for staff.

2007   Entered the space of school social work by offering the Juvenile Justice in Schools Programme to four schools.

MCYS appointed Beyond as a partner to assist them as Family Group Conference Co-ordinators.

2008   Collaborated with the Potsdam University of Applied Sciences, Germany to run a customised Certificate in Systemic Case Management programme for staff.

2009   Collaborated with the Potsdam University of Applied Sciences, Germany to deliver an adventure based experiential learning certificate programme for staff.

Coordinated Good Company, a loose alliance of social service providers that came together to strengthen the capability and capacity of the sector. It comprised Beyond Social Services, Beautiful People, the then-MILK Compassion Fund, Society Against Family Violence, Students Care Service (now known as SHINE Children and Youth Services) and WE CARE Community Services.

2010   Contributed to the Alternate Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Provided feedback during a public consultation on the Children and Young Persons (Amendment) Bill (Bill No 35/2010), to recognise the primary responsibility of parents and guardians to care for their children, which was incorporated into the draft bill.

Youth and staff from Beyond were involved in the Singapore Youth Olympic Games in August 2010.

2011   Conducted a major programme review, which led to a shift towards long-term work with young people and their communities, to help youth achieve economic and social stability — keeping in touch with them until they reach 25 years old.

Initiated Youth United Day, where youths, families, donors, volunteers, Board members and partners get together to celebrate Youth Day.

Jointly organised a Family Group Conferencing Certification course with the Potsdam University of Applied Sciences in Germany, five German state youth agencies, and Eigen Kracht Centrale, the key conference coordinator in Amsterdam. Sixteen Beyond staff and four from partner agencies were certified as Family Group Conference co-ordinators.

Completed the Singapore Youth Resilience Survey, which examined various internal and external factors contributing to youth resilience. It revealed a consistent drop in resilience for students after Secondary Two.

2012   Conducted a retrospective study to explore the effect of the organisation's work on ex-beneficiaries, which found that social capital and interpersonal relationships were strong factors in transforming at-risk youth into well-balanced adults.

Collaborated with interns and students from the National University of Singapore on various research projects studying youth engagement through sport, juvenile delinquency and restorative justice in Singapore, as well as a community-based study of Ang Mo Kio.

Worked with The Constellation on building competence in the Community Life Competency Process, which facilitates communities to tap on their strengths to take ownership of challenges.

Began to take an explicit community development approach to its work, characterised by a high level of local voluntarism and community participation. Eighty per cent of activities were community-led with young people and their families taking up active leadership roles.

2013   To give the issues of vulnerable families and teen pregnancy an undivided standalone focus, The Bukit Ho Swee Family Service Centre became an independent entity and was renamed the South Central Community Family Service Centre, and Babes Pregnancy Crisis Support became an independent organisation.

2014   Embarked on a Community Relationship Management (CRM) database system in order to help maintain long-term relationships with the community.
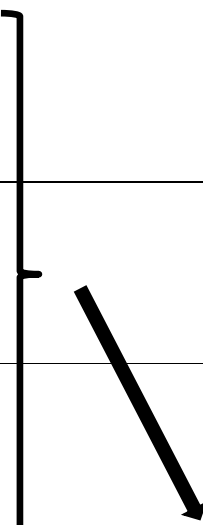
2015   The Beautiful People Programme was hived off as an independent entity caring for vulnerable girls and women through mentorship and other developmental programmes.

End of partnership with the MILK Fund.

Organised fundraising events: the first "Fairground for All" and "The Really Authentic Kumar"

2016   Hosted the Shirin Fozdar Conference on the Move, and in 2017.

2017   Introduced SALT and the Community Life Competence Process to the social sector.

Appointed service-learning partner with Ngee Ann Polytechnic and practice partner with the Singapore Polytechnic's Applied Drama and Psychology Programme.

2018   Released results of the Youth United Impact Study, a programme evaluation of one of Beyond's core programmes, Youth United. It found that youth and adults felt safer in their neighbourhoods, and were better able to share their concerns with their neighbours. Youth also found their neighbours more friendly, and felt they could better handle problems at home.

Relaunched the Family Group Conferencing Co-ordinators Certification Programme together with the Potsdam University of Applied Sciences, Eigen Kracht Centrale and Daybreak Family Group Conferences, the key conference coordinating agency in the United Kingdom. It involved 18 staff from Beyond and seven from other agencies.

Shared the impact of the community theatre programme started in 2013, at a roundtable on the development of community arts in Singapore organised by the Institute of Policy Studies and the Singapore Art Museum.

Keynote presentation "What is a strong community? How do you create communities?" at the Inaugural Community Forum 2018 organised by the Institute of Policy Studies.

Facilitated the participation of eight mothers and three youths in the community, at the 2018 Global Learning Festival in Bandung, where they presented their community-building efforts and exchanged notes with facilitators from other countries.

Partnered with A Good Space, a community-partnership initiative of the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre (NVPC). Co-facilitated A Good Conversation with partners from the Constellation for some 30 leaders in the social space.

Staff member Stella Jayanthi was awarded the Champion for Women's Empowerment Award at the AWARE Awards.

Launched Beyond 50, a commemorative fundraiser seeking to appreciate our donors and volunteers, moving towards Beyond's 50th anniversary in August 2019.

2019   Presented Beyond's work at the Asset-Based Community Development Learning Festival in Goa.

Worked with the Institute of Policy Studies in a project which studied case exemplars of ground-up approaches to community development in Singapore.

In partnership with ArtsWok Collaborative, youths from Beyond performed an original play on poverty at the Esplanade as part of the M1 Peer Pleasure Youth Theatre Festival.

Implemented a pilot project to test a new model of social assistance. Led by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth in partnership with The Majurity Trust, it was based on the Family Independence Initiative by Mauricio Lim Miller, and focused on equipping families with social networks, capital and autonomy to improve their lives independently.

Completed the 50th anniversary publication, entitled *Going Beyond Social Services: Safeguarding Community*

Annex C – Beyond Social Services' Theory of Change

ACTIVITIES / PROGRAMME COMPONENTS	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	MID-TERM OUTCOMES	LONG-TERM OUTCOMES	SOCIAL IMPACT
• Fundraising • Research, advocacy, commentaries, newsletters	STAKEHOLDERS/ CORPORATES/FUNDERS PROVIDE ADEQUATE SUPPORT FOR BEYOND'S WORK			
Community mapping & sharing	MEMBERS AWARE OF NEIGHBOURS & COMMUNITY ASSETS			
Bonding and social events	MEMBERS FEEL SENSE OF BELONGING & EMOTIONAL CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY			COMMUNITY
• Liaison with Residents' or Citizens' Committees for space • Resources: Planning and logistics	MEMBERS ACCESS SPACE, RESOURCES & HAVE THE POWER TO ACT			
Catalyse local community action		MEMBERS ACCOUNTABLE TO ONE ANOTHER/ ENGAGED IN MUTUAL HELP/ COLLECTIVE ACTION		
			SAFE & MUTUALLY SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY	
			FAMILY	CHILDREN AND YOUTH FROM DISADVANATGED BACKGROUNDS [HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO] REFUSE A LIFE OF DELINQUENCY & WELFARE DEPENDENCY
Informal job creation, seasonal income generation	VIABLE EMPLOYMENT			
Short-term financial support		SENIOR/FAMILY IS FINANCIALLY INDEPENDENT		
			STABLE & RESILIENT FAMILIES	
		[RELATIONAL ASPECTS?]	CHILDREN	
Learning journeys	CHILDREN AND YOUTH APPRECIATE THE VALUE OF LEARNING & ARE MOTIVATED TO UPGRADE	CHILDREN AND YOUTH COMPLETE EDUCATION		
			CHILDREN AND YOUTH ARE ECONOMICALLY SKILLED & SOCIALLY COMPETENT	CHILDREN AND YOUTH LIVE A SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE & PURPOSEFUL LIFE OF THEIR OWN DESIGN
		CHILDREN AND YOUTH ACQUIRE MORAL & SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS, AND A SENSE OF PURPOSE		